

**Address by His Excellency General Secretary of Vietnam Communist Party  
Nguyen Phu Trong at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)  
(Washington D.C., 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015)**

Good afternoon everyone!

It's my great pleasure to be with you here today on the occasion of my official visit to the United States. I would like to thank the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) for inviting me to address this meeting.

I've learned that CSIS is one of the preeminent institutions for research and academic exchange in the United States. It plays a critical role in promoting academic exchange and dialogue among politicians, scholars and people from across the world on issues of significant importance to international peace, security and development. My compliments to your outstanding achievements. And thank you all for your presence.

My visit to the United States comes at a time when we are celebrating 20 years of diplomatic relations between Viet Nam and the United States. This is a meaningful time for us to reflect upon the relationship between our two countries and share the vision for the future.

**History of Viet Nam – U.S. Relations**

There were events in the history of Viet Nam - U.S. relations that are little known. Thomas Jefferson, before becoming the third President of the United States, tried to obtain rice seed from Viet Nam to grow on his Shadwell farm in Virginia.

100 hundred years ago, Vietnamese patriot Nguyen Tat Thanh – who later became President Ho Chi Minh, during his quest for national liberation set foot in the city of Boston – the starting point of the revolution for independence in the United States.

In World War II, Viet Nam and the United States were allies on the front against fascism. The Viet Nam Independence League or Viet Minh led by President Ho Chi Minh rescued American pilots who had been shot down by Japanese troops in Viet Nam, and the only foreigners who were side by side with President Ho Chi Minh during the early days of the August Revolution were American friends.

The Declaration of Independence of the new Viet Nam in 1945 began with the quote from the American Declaration of Independence: “All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator of certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”.

One of the first nations that President Ho Chi Minh wished to establish friendly ties with was the United States. He wrote 14 letters to American leaders, including President Harry Truman, to ask for a “full cooperation with the United States”. It is regrettable that some historic opportunities were missed and we had to encounter a period full of twists and turns in the history between our two nations until the normalization of relations in 1995.

Today in America, there are still different opinions about the war the United States conducted in Viet Nam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the Vietnamese people, it is the war of resistance for national independence, freedom and unification, not the war against the United States nor one against the American people.

Even in the midst of war, the Vietnamese people still maintained friendship with the American people and were grateful to many Americans who stood up in protest of the war and expressed solidarity with the Vietnamese people, a remarkable example of whom was Martin Luther King, Jr.

After the end of the war, Viet Nam advocated to “put behind the past and look to the future”. While suffering heavily from the consequences of war with 3 million people dead, 4 million wounded, 4.8 million exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin and hundreds of thousands missing right in their homeland, the Government and people of Viet Nam were actively engaged in an effective cooperation with the United States in accounting for American soldiers missing in action in Viet Nam.

Today, all Americans who come to Viet Nam including war veterans are warmly welcomed and can feel the sincere friendship of the Vietnamese people. That may not be easy to understand for some, but that’s the truth that everyone who used to come to Viet Nam could see first-hand. Having recalled history, I want to affirm the tradition of peace and friendship of the Vietnamese people and our persistent desire for good friendship and cooperation between Viet Nam and the United States.

### **Viet Nam – U.S. Relations over the Past Two Decades**

20 years ago, few people could imagine how Viet Nam and the United States would overcome the pains of war to build such a robust partnership as today. Over the past 20 years, Viet Nam - U.S. relations have gone from strength to strength all the way through important milestones from the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1995 to the signing of Bilateral Trade Agreement in 2000, and most recently the establishment of Comprehensive Partnership in 2013.

Bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas has made substantial progress. Economic cooperation has kept growing strongly, and the United States today is Viet Nam’s leading trade partner. Cooperation in science, technology, education and training has seen very positive steps forward. There are currently over 16,500 Vietnamese students studying in the United States. The two-way trade turnover increased by 90 folds in the last two decades from US\$400 million in 1995 to US\$36 billion in 2014.

Cooperation in defense and security has made steady progress with the signing of the MOU on Bilateral Defense Cooperation in 2011 and particularly the Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations in June this year. Viet Nam and the United States also enjoy good coordination on many international and regional issues from counter-terrorism, climate change response, rising sea levels to maritime security, nuclear security, maintaining peace, stability and promoting cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Humanitarian cooperation including activities to address war legacy issues has been realized effectively by both sides. It is Viet Nam's consistent policy to consider the accounting for American soldiers missing in action during the war in Viet Nam a humanitarian issue, where we will continue to engage in an effective cooperation with the United States. People-to-people ties have increasingly expanded and act as an important contributing factor to enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the two countries.

The robust growth of the Viet Nam - U.S. relationship over the past 20 years has been grounded in the respect for the fundamental principles of international law, among these are respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, political regime and cooperation for mutual benefit. Along the way over these 20 years, Viet Nam and the United States have gradually achieved common ground of these principles. This is also an important contributing factor to building political trust between the two countries.

It can be asserted that the development of friendship and cooperation between Viet Nam and the United States over the past 20 years is positive, follows the right direction and brings about practical benefits to both peoples. It is beneficial for peace, stability, cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific and the world.

This is the result of hard work by the leaders and people of both countries in the spirit of putting behind the past, overcoming differences, maximizing commonalities and looking to the future. This is also an example for the success story of the relationship between two countries having different political backgrounds and used to be adversaries in the past, which is conducive to the trend of peace and cooperation of the time.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the statesmen, organizations and individuals from both Viet Nam and the United States who, with heart-felt support and hard work, have made significant contributions to promoting friendship and cooperation between our two countries in the past decades.

My special thanks go to American friends who have been actively assisting Viet Nam to overcome the consequences of war and those who always stand by our side to support the cause of national development and national defense of the Vietnamese people.

The accomplishments and lessons of the past 20 years give us all reason for great optimism and expectation about the future of Viet Nam - U.S. relations.

### **International Affairs and Viet Nam's Foreign Policy**

A fast and deeply changing world requires ourselves to be exposed to new ways of thinking and new ways of action.

Scientific and technological advances, cooperation and development trends, globalization and democratization are opening up new opportunities for prosperity and cooperation among nations. Economic and financial crises along with social and humanitarian crises pose new demands for

an equitable and sustainable growth model, for the economic relationship between nations and the international economic order.

Traditional and non-traditional security challenges including, among others, territorial disputes, terrorism, religious extremism, cyber security, aviation and maritime security have emerged in new forms, affecting international peace, stability and development, hence requiring new mindsets and approaches to security.

Environmental and ecological crises, climate change, natural disasters, and epidemics continue to unfold with complexity, posing new demands for production methods and people's way of life, and for managing human relationship with nature.

In a globalized world where interdependence among nations is increasing both in terms of development and security, international law, mutual respect and cooperation between nations must be upheld more than ever before.

The Asia Pacific – the world's most dynamic region embraces all the common features of the world while maintaining its unique attributes. While economic cooperation and integration are taking place vigorously with a huge variety of initiatives for intra and extra-regional connectivity, challenges to peace, security and stability have become ever more acute, especially increasing tensions in maritime disputes.

While economic interdependence among countries is increasing, our region lacks an efficient arrangement, mechanism or architecture for collective security to cope with emerging risks and challenges, among which nationalism, religious extremism and unilateralism tend to rise. Against that context, all countries including Viet Nam and the United States are required to increase their interest in and cooperation efforts for a region and a world of peace, security and prosperity.

From the economic perspective, we support the cooperation models for equitable, sustainable and mutually beneficial development between countries. We support the initiatives to boost trade and investment to bring about equal benefits to all, especially to workers in all countries. We believe the best way of cooperation is based on the principle of mutual reinforcement for shared development, helping narrow down development gaps among nations.

From the political and security perspective, we support the friendship and equal cooperation between nations on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political regime, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful resolution of all disputes in accordance with the UN Charter and international law, non-use or threat of force.

We support the formation of economic and security cooperation mechanisms among countries in the region and the world in keeping with such principles.

We support an Asia-Pacific region of peace, stability and cooperation for shared prosperity, connected by intra and extra-regional economic linkages and economic cooperation for mutual

benefit, having agreements and mechanisms to ensure the common security, freedom of navigation and over-flight in accordance with the UN Charter and international law. We are of the view that upholding ASEAN's centrality in evolving political and security architectures in the Asia-Pacific region is conducive and beneficial to regional and international peace and security. We believe that the Asia-Pacific region offers enough opportunities for all countries in and outside the region including the United States, China, Japan, India, Russia and the EU.

In that spirit, Viet Nam continues to pursue a foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation and development, multilateralization and diversification of external relations, and proactive international integration. Viet Nam has established diplomatic ties with over 180 countries, comprehensive partnership and strategic partnership with important partners in the region and across the world.

Viet Nam has been actively engaging in the negotiations for many bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, among which TPP with the United States and other partners is of significant importance.

### **The Future of Viet Nam-U.S. Relations**

Our two countries have established the Comprehensive Partnership. That's a very important premise for advancing bilateral ties over the coming years.

Looking ahead, we need to work together to deepen and broaden the Comprehensive Partnership in order to lay the foundation for taking bilateral ties to the next level in the future.

An important impetus to the Viet Nam - U.S. partnership towards that end lies in the shared interests between our two nations.

- First, we have shared interest in promoting comprehensive cooperation for development and prosperity in each country and for the happiness of both peoples.
- Second, we have shared interest in advancing regional cooperation for peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in maintaining peace, maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and over-flight in the East Sea on the basis of respect for international law.
- Third, we have shared interest in collaboration and coordination of efforts to contribute to common global issues as responsible members of the international community.

A strong, prosperous, stable, independent and self-reliant Viet Nam fully integrated with the world and making responsible contributions to the international community is in the interest of peace, security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and the world, and is conducive to the interests of the United States and other countries in and outside the region.

Looking ahead, we have much work to do to advance the bilateral ties further forward.

First and foremost, advancing mutual understanding, building and consolidating political trust between the leaders, political circles and people from both countries are essential to deepen and broaden friendship and cooperation between Viet Nam and the United States.

To this end, we need to increase high level exchanges and contacts to include legislative bodies and political parties, expand consultation and dialogue mechanisms in areas of mutual interest. This is one of the objectives of my visit to the United States. We are also looking forward to welcoming President Barack Obama in Viet Nam in the time to come.

Economic, trade and investment cooperation remains the focus of bilateral ties and must be advanced further as it acts as both the foundation and the driver for bilateral cooperation.

So far American investment in Viet Nam remains modest, and the United States is only ranked the 7<sup>th</sup> among countries and territories investing in Viet Nam. The United States has yet to recognize Viet Nam as a market economy and still imposes trade barriers to Vietnamese goods. I hope that the conclusion of TPP in the time to come will give a strong boost to American investment in Viet Nam and will facilitate trade between the two countries, between the United States and ASEAN, for American exports to Viet Nam - an emerging market of 90 million people are connected to the larger market of the ASEAN Community of 600 million people. The United States' recognition of Viet Nam's market economy status is a necessary step to that end.

Cooperation in science, technology, education, training, health, environment, etc, is a red dot and an area of huge potential in bilateral ties. These are also areas closely related to the quality of sustainable development, where Viet Nam pays great attention to and the United States has many strengths that can be shared with us.

During my visit, Ho Chi Minh City will grant license to the construction of Fulbright University. We encourage and call on American enterprises, universities, research institutes, organizations and individuals to increase investment in and cooperation with Viet Nam in these areas.

Cooperation in defense and security is an element contributing to enhancing trust and adding strategic values to bilateral ties, which should be fostered based on appropriate steps in line with the interests of both countries.

Both sides must continue to implement effectively the Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Defense Cooperation signed in 2011 and especially the Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations signed in Hanoi last June. At the same time, we should expand cooperation on law enforcement, counter-terrorism, maritime security and others to contribute to the maintenance of peace, stability and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

Cooperation on humanitarian issues must continue to be strongly promoted to help address war consequences, build trust and enhance friendship between the two peoples. The consequences of war in Viet Nam remain heavy until today. Generations of Vietnamese are still struggling with such a harsh war legacy.

Over the past decades, many American organizations and individuals including war veterans have conducted practical activities to help Viet Nam overcome war consequences. The U.S. Congress has adopted annual funding to help address war legacy issues in Viet Nam including remediation of dioxin-contaminated hotspots and removal of unexploded ordnance.

Nevertheless, the results achieved are still modest compared to the practical demands. As we advocate to put behind the past, we should work hand-in-hand to heal the wounds of war. This is a very sensitive issue touching the heart and emotion of people from both countries. Therefore, an effective coordination by both sides to handle this issue will significantly contribute to fostering bilateral ties.

People-to-people exchanges are essential to further enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples. Viet Nam and the United States share an uneasy history. I've learnt that many prejudices against Viet Nam still exist in the United States. But I also know another truth that most Americans after visiting Viet Nam have a more positive view towards my country, and all are impressed by a vibrant, non-discriminatory and humane society and by the friendly, optimistic and open-minded Vietnamese.

Over the past 20 years, our two countries have come to a better understanding of each other. Yet a fuller mutual understanding, which is critical to building mutual trust and friendship, must still be promoted. I do hope that both countries will work to strengthen contacts and exchanges through all channels, particularly between the NGOs and the people towards that end.

Another extremely important contributing factor to the bilateral ties is the Vietnamese community in the United States, who are American citizens but are also our compatriots. I hope that the US Administration will continue to provide favorable conditions for the Vietnamese who are living, working and studying in the United States so that they can successfully integrate into the U.S. society and make positive contributions to the prosperity of the United States and to Viet Nam - U.S. relations.

Human rights is an issue of great interest to the American political circle and public and is also a sensitive issue in Viet Nam - U.S. relations. I would like to affirm that Viet Nam attaches great importance to human rights.

Certainly there remain many limitations and problems in our country that we need to address including the issue of human rights, but we are making efforts every day to strive for a better and better society for all.

I understand that this is an issue where both sides still have differences, and we need to continue frank, constructive and goodwill dialogue in order to have a general approach to the systematic and fundamental changes, and based on which to come up with more balanced assessment on human rights and religious freedom in Viet Nam. This issue should not be allowed to hinder the growing momentum of bilateral ties as well as to affect trust building between the two countries. Cooperation on regional and international issues is an increasingly important part of bilateral ties. Viet Nam is ready to increase the coordination with the United States on international issues

of mutual concern including counter-terrorism, cyber security, epidemics and climate change response.

Viet Nam will continue to work with the United States and other countries to build the ASEAN – U.S. Strategic Partnership to become one with increasing significance to peace, stability, cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific; uphold ASEAN’s centrality; ensure the effectiveness of the ARF, ADMM+; make APEC play a more practical role in regional economic arrangements; and turn the East Asia Summit (EAS) into an effective platform for handling strategic and political issues in the region.

We highly appreciate the United States’ increasing interest in the situation in the East Sea as well as its timely expression of consistent position in support of peaceful resolution of disputes on the basis of respect for international law, non-use or threat of force, refraining from unilateral actions to change status quo, militarization or imposition of control over the waters and airspace in the East Sea.

Viet Nam welcomes countries, including the United State, to play an active and responsible role in maintaining peace, security, stability, maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and promoting development cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

The lessons of history and the accomplishments of the past 20 years have clearly shown that friendship and cooperation is the only right path for Viet Nam - U.S. relations. It is beneficial for both countries, conducive to the interests of both peoples and those of the region and the world. The differences that remain between our two countries reflect an objective and inevitable reality in a diverse world where all nations are entitled to choose their own development path. Yet, the reality of the past 20 years has shown that our two countries share many common interests, and differences cannot, in any way, be an obstacle to the growing friendship and cooperation between Viet Nam and the United States.

In today’s fast changing world, the overlapping interests between our two countries have ever broadened. Looking ahead, Viet Nam - U.S. relations should move towards deepened and broadened, practical and effective partnership and towards new heights, in the interest of the two peoples, for peace, stability, cooperation and prosperity in the region and in the world. The experience and accomplishments of the past 20 years give us all reason for our conviction in that future.

President Theodor Roosevelt has said, and I quote: “Believe you can and you are halfway there.” I believe that together we can build a bright vision for our future relations, so that our two peoples and our children will always be good friends and partners.

Thank you for your attention.