

**Terms of Reference for
a Tripartite National Task Force to Establish
*One United Nations in Viet Nam***

A. Background

The United Nations (UN) has an important global development mandate and a vital role to play in Viet Nam. The UN actively seeks to strengthen national capacity as a prerequisite to national ownership, to provide objective monitoring and evaluation of government activities and improve access to international experience, expertise and best practice. For the UN to act on this mandate it must achieve greater focus, technical proficiency and efficiency in its operations.

In 1997 the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched a programme of UN reform to improve the organisation's internal coordination, coherence and efficiency in responding to the global challenges of the 21st century. Progress has been made towards greater harmonization and coherence among UN agencies at the country level, and particularly among UN development agencies. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) has put in place common analytical and programming tools such as the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) to enable UN Country Teams, particularly the four agencies of the Executive Committee of UNDG to harmonize their approaches and programmes.¹ However, many Governments, donors and UN agencies are in favour of accelerating the pace of UN reform at the country level to increase the impact and efficiency of the operations of the development agencies.

The Government of Viet Nam has been a longstanding and consistent proponent of UN reform and harmonization of UN agencies. The UN and Viet Nam enjoy a close and trusting relationship built up over many years of engagement and based on shared aspirations. The Government wants a strong United Nations that is in a position to contribute substantively to Viet Nam's development. At successive Consultative Group Meetings and other opportunities senior government officials have expressed their desire to see more rapid integration of UN programmes and operations to strengthen the organization. Most recently, Viet Nam's Permanent Representative to the United Nations reiterated this position in a statement to the Joint UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board.

At the same time, the Government of Viet Nam has emerged as a leader among developing countries in the aid effectiveness agenda. Viet Nam was selected as a pilot country at the Rome and Paris High Level Forums, and has localized the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in the form of the Ha Noi Core Statement. Viet Nam's Ha Noi Core Statement and Harmonization Action Plan represent a major step forward in developing country leadership in the global process of ODA management and reform. Development partners in Viet Nam have agreed to concrete and monitorable targets on alignment to national strategies, harmonization and simplification of procedures and other actions to enhance national ownership and reduce transaction costs.

¹ The four UNDG Executive Committee (ExCom) members are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The United Nations agencies strongly support the government's efforts to increase aid effectiveness. The UN is a longstanding proponent of national ownership of development policies and programmes, untied aid and other aspects of the Paris Declaration and Ha Noi Core Statement. Yet the United Nations agencies are not a bystander in these events. Viet Nam's pioneering efforts to make aid more effective and efficient demands an innovative response from the United Nations Country Team.

A first attempt to enunciate the rationale for accelerated harmonization of UN development activities was produced in September 2005, when the UN Resident Coordinator and UNICEF Representative jointly drafted in an informal discussion paper on UN reform in Viet Nam. The paper argued that the Government's leadership in formulating global strategies to promote ODA harmonization, including harmonization of UN agencies, presents a real opportunity for bold steps towards One United Nations in Viet Nam. The paper, although not officially circulated, generated considerable interest among Government counterparts and donors. However, the point was made that the paper did not propose an implementation plan to achieve One UN. Subsequently, Government and donors requested that the UNCT produce a second paper sketching out a road map towards UN harmonization including concrete actions and an approximate timetable for their completion.

The second paper was completed in February 2006 and circulated among Government agencies, UN agencies and donors. A short meeting was held at the Ministry of Planning and Investment on 22 February 2006. The main outcome of this meeting was a proposal that Government, UN Agencies and donors establish a Tripartite National Task Force, the purpose of which will be to develop a detailed implementation plan and timetable to establish One United Nations in Viet Nam. These terms of reference set out the objectives, composition, outputs and timetable for the work of the Tripartite National Task Force.

B. Objectives

The objective of the Tripartite National Task Force is to advance UN reform by providing effective oversight of the unification process and serve an advisory function. The United Nations will initially be represented by the three ExCom Agencies of UNDG with country presence (UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA) and UNAIDS. Other agencies will retain the option of joining as and when this becomes possible depending on their internal governance structures.

Three technical sub-groups with representatives from UN and the Government will be established with immediate effect to develop concrete and practical implementation plans for the establishment of a One United Nations in Viet Nam with a unified management, budget, programme, set of management practices and possibly one UN house.

The three sub-groups will be;

- 1) One UN House (MOFA lead)
- 2) One Plan and One Budget (MPI and MOF)

- 3) One set of Management Practices (a broadening of the current Harmonized Cash Transfer Modality (HACT) working group, which include UN, MPI and MOF)

Other Government Ministries and Donors will be invited to participate in the sub-groups as and when relevant.

D. Composition of Task Force

The Tripartite National Task Force will consist of high-level representatives of Government from the four aid coordinating Ministries, the international donor community in Viet Nam and the UNDG ExCom agencies as follows:

Government (four members, Director or Deputy Director level)

- Ministry of Planning and Investment
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Finance
- Office of Government

Donors (maximum of six members on a six months rotational basis)

- United Kingdom, Head of Mission or deputy
- Norway, Head of Mission or deputy
- Netherlands, Head of Mission or deputy
- France, Head of Mission or deputy
- Spain, Head of Mission or deputy
- Japan, Head of Mission or deputy

United Nations

- The United Nations Resident Coordinator
- United Nations Development Programme, Resident Representative
- United Nations Children's Fund, Resident Representative
- United Nations Population's Fund, Resident Representative
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Country Coordinator

It is imperative that the members of the Tripartite National Task Force represent their institutions at a high level due to the importance and sensitivity of the issues to be addressed.

UN Specialized Agencies will be invited to sit in on the Tripartite National Task Force as observers. Representatives from developing countries expected to introduce joint UN Office models in the coming few years (e.g. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia and South Africa) will be invited from time to time and where relevant.

Bearing in mind that the Tripartite National Task Force will essentially provide oversight of the unification process and serve an advisory function, it will be the technical sub-working groups on operational issues that will be responsible for developing detailed implementation plans in specific areas. They will do so in close consultation and cooperation with respective agencies' Headquarter and Regional Offices and with guidance from United Nations Development Group.

The Tripartite National Task Force will be co-chaired by MPI and the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The UN Office of the Resident Coordinator will act Secretariat for the group and support MPI in organizing, preparing and follow up of meetings.

E. Outputs

Expected outputs may be grouped into three phases:

- 1) Until end May 2006 expected outputs include;
 - Finalization and agreement on TOR for Tripartite National Task Force.
 - Finalization and agreement of Principle Statement to be presented to the UNSG on 24 May
 - Establishment of the three sub-working groups

- 2) End May to 1 September 2006, outputs will include but not be limited to;
 - Sub-working groups finalize options papers for implementation plans for one programme, one budget and set of management structure
 - Finalization of options paper for One UN house
 - Review of legal instruments including existing Standard Basic Agreements for the three ExCom agencies
 - Internal and possibly external consultants to review and develop implementation plan for one management structure
 - Preparatory steps for launch of one management structure by 1 September

- 3) 1 Sept 2006 to Dec 2007
 - Implementation of one programme, one budget and one set of management practices in accordance with agreed work plans with clearly identified milestones along the way.
 - Explore options for UN Specialized agencies to join the One UN.

The Tripartite National Task Force and its sub-working groups should make effort to build on existing global experience and best practice in implementing a unified UN structure at country level. It is however fully recognized that localized solutions will have to be found to many of the issues.

F. Time Frame

The Tripartite National Task Force is expected to exist until the One UN for the three ExCom agencies has been fully established and preferably no longer than Dec 2007.