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Vietnam enacts its first disability law

McLean, VA -- On June 17, 2010, the National Assembly of Vietnam enacted the first comprehensive national law guaranteeing the rights of people with disabilities. The new law mandates equal participation in society for people with disabilities through accommodation and access to health care, rehabilitation, education, employment, vocational training, cultural services, sports and entertainment, transportation, public places, and information technology. This law, drafted with the support of U.S. funded technical assistance, is expected to have a direct impact on the growth of Vietnam's economy, as inclusive policies expand opportunities for Vietnamese with disabilities to be productive and achieve economic independence.

The National Disability Law is the culmination of an intensive effort of more than a decade to develop a legal framework for an inclusive society where people with disabilities have access to the programs and supports necessary for their full participation. This effort began with the passage of the national Ordinance on People with Disabilities in 1998, and led to a series of initiatives to advance the rights and interests of people with disabilities, including:

- Establishment of the inter-agency National Coordinating Council on Disability (NCCD) ;
- Enactment of the barrier-free access code and standards for public construction
- Enactment of barrier-free access standards and regulations for public transport
- Disability inclusion provisions in the Vocational Training Law
- Implementation of a five-year National Action Plan on disability.

These achievements in policy reform and implementation have brought direct benefits to more than 7 million Vietnamese with disabilities, and indirectly benefitted several million more. The Vietnamese government is set to begin work this summer to develop a regulatory framework and implementation guidance for the new law.

Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH) has provided significant support to the Vietnamese government in bringing about these pivotal reforms through a series of grant initiatives funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and targeted program funds from the Nippon Foundation. VNAH and its international technical partners have been at the forefront of the disability law effort, providing technical assistance to the legal drafting team, promoting the alignment of Viet Nam's disability law with the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the U.S ADA, supporting grassroots review and input to the law's development, as well as exposing Vietnam's policy-makers and legislators to international good practices on disability rights through international exchange. VNAH will continue to work in partnership with the Government of Vietnam as it implements the National Disability Law.

For more information on VNAH's humanitarian program in Vietnam, visit: <http://www.vnah-hev.org>

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