The Centre for Democratic Institutions

National Assembly of Vietnam study tour on Institutional Training of Parliamentarians

At the request of the Office of the National Assembly of Vietnam (ONA), CDI conducted a study tour for seven senior officials from the ONA on 9 and 10 December 2003. The study tour is part of a UNDP funded program (VIE/02/007). This program is a joint initiative between the National Assembly of Vietnam and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to establish a National Training Centre within the National Assembly of Vietnam for Members of the National Assembly and People’s Deputies at the provincial, district and commune level. CDI was pleased to be invited to participate in the project.

The delegation in Canberra for the study tour comprised:

- Dr. Nguyen Si Dung (Head of the delegation), Vice Chairman of the ONA and National Project Director, UNDP VIE/02/007 Project;
- Mr. Nguyen Van Binh, Vice Chairman of the Commission on Deputies Affairs, National Assembly Standing Committee;
- Mr. Bui Duc Lai, Senior Specialist, the Committee on Organisation of the Central Committee of Vietnam;
- Ms. Khuc Bao Tuy, Deputy Director, Department for Deputies Affairs, ONA;
- Ms. Hoang Thi Kim Yen, Deputy Director, Department for Organisation and Personnel, ONA;
- Ms. Tran Tuyet Mai, Deputy Head, Information Division of the Centre for Information, Library and Research Services, ONA;
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Han, Specialist, Project Management Division, ONA and National Project Manager of the UNDP VIE/02/007 Project.

Study Tour Objectives

As part of intended reform within the National Assembly of Vietnam, the Assembly will establish a Training Centre for Members of the National Assembly and People’s Deputies. In developing the training centre, the National Assembly is studying the experiences of some countries in the region in providing institutional training for parliamentarians. As well as the study tour in Canberra, the delegation visited training institutions in Beijing, South Korea and met with the Department of Education Training and Employment in Adelaide and the University of Technology, Sydney.

The delegation was interested to learn from the experiences of various institutions in Canberra, in particular the delegation requested information on:
• the type of training newly appointed parliamentarians receive;
• the organisational structure and the functions of a training centre;
• difficulties encountered;
• successes and failures;
• program design and implementation;
• co-ordination mechanisms with other institutions, both nationally and internationally;
• achieving best practice.

In this context, the delegation was interested in the role that CDI plays in training parliamentarians in Southeast Asia and Pacific regions.

**Study Tour Program in Canberra**

Responding to the request received from the National Assembly, the program provided an overview of how the Australian Parliament briefs newly appointed parliamentarians and the support services they receive. The program also outlined the information supplied by the Australian Electoral Commission relating to voter education, political party issues and candidates’ campaigns.

The delegation visited the Funding and Disclosure Section at the Australian Electoral Commission. Kathy Mitchell, Director of Funding and Disclosure and Doug Orr, Assistant Commissioner of Elections, delivered a presentation on party registration, funding and disclosure. The presentation outlined the information provided to parties and their candidates relating to eligibility requirements to register a political party, how to register a party, the benefits and obligations of registering, payment of public funding, who is eligible to receive funding and the disclosure obligations. The delegation received copies of the information packages, handbooks and guides available to parties and their candidates. The delegation was also interested in the role and functions of the Commission, particularly during elections and the level of funding parties receive based on election results.

The program included a visit to the Education Centre at the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The delegation observed primary school students take part in the Commission’s school education program. This exposed the delegation to a type of civic education which was interactive, informative and engaged people at a young age to learn about the electoral processes in Australia. The delegation received copies of the education material for school children as well as information such as the electoral pocketbook. Discussions were held with Cate Thompson, Deputy Director of the AEC and Judy Kelly from the AEC relating to their education program and Australian electoral processes more generally. It was an interesting exercise for the delegation to learn about voting for members in the House of Representatives and voting for Senators or a particular party in the Senate. The National Assembly in Vietnam has only one chamber and the population votes for individual members within this chamber on a provincial basis.
A session was held with the Department of the Parliamentary Library (DPL) in the Federal Parliament. Nola Adcock, Deputy Head of the Information and Research Services provided an outline of the various services and training provided by the DPL to new parliamentarians and their staff. The delegation received information about the Australian Parliament’s Outreach Program for new Senators, Members and their staff and the staff of parliamentary committees as well as a copy of the Guide to Services booklet. New parliamentarians are also able to access information through promotional flyers, newsletters, displays, television broadcasts, announcements and the Federal Parliament’s website.

Mr Ian Harris, Clerk of the House of Representatives, delivered a presentation on the training and induction service for newly appointed Members of the House of Representatives. Mr Harris provided information on seminars for new Members as well as the booklets, internet services and personal presentations on the role and responsibilities of a Member of the House. Mr Harris also outlined the personal support provided to assist in adjusting to life as a parliamentarian.

Cleaver Elliott, Clerk Assistant to Procedures from the Department of the Senate, delivered a presentation on strategies for training parliamentarians and the difficulties, successes and failures that may be encountered. Mr Elliott outlined the importance of setting clear objectives, identifying expectations and constantly updating and revising training programs to ensure training remains relevant. In his presentation, Mr Elliott stressed the importance of ensuring consistency between the theory taught in a training session and the daily practices within the Chambers as well as establishing a clear relationship between the induction training and the continuing training or advisory service. Mr Elliott outlined a number of strategies for effectively portraying different types of information.

CDI Executive Officer, Felicity Pascoe, delivered a presentation on the work of CDI and the role CDI plays in training parliamentarians in the region. In particular, the delegation was interested to receive information about the Parliamentary Officials Course that was conducted by CDI and the Graduate Program in Public Policy at the Australian National University in November this year. During the CDI session, Dr Ian Marsh from the Political Science Program in the Research School of Social Science at the ANU provided an overview on the role of committees and the Executive in the Australian Parliament. The delegation compared the role and strength of their National Assembly committees with that of Australian parliamentary committees. After gaining insight into the training provided by the Australian parliament, the session with Dr Marsh enabled the delegation to contextualise this training within the Australian parliamentary system. Dr Marsh also spoke on bi-cameral and unicameral systems of government in Southeast Asia.

**Evaluation and future initiatives**

The delegation valued the opportunity to learn about the experiences and strategies for briefing parliamentarians in Australia. The information sessions and discussions that took place prompted the delegation to think about appropriate and relevant models for training
parliamentarians within the National Assembly of Vietnam. This study tour was also a valuable opportunity to make contact with people in Australia who may be able to provide advice and information as the training centre in the National Assembly develops.

One of the needs identified by the delegation was the improvement in televising the work of the National Assembly of Vietnam. CDI will therefore develop a distance learning program with staff from the National Assembly about effective televising of parliamentary proceedings.

**PROGRAM**

**Wednesday 10 December**
9.30am-11.30am  Funding and Disclosure Section (FDS), Australian Electoral Commission  
*Kathy Mitchell, Director, Funding and Disclosure  
Doug Orr, Assistant Commissioner, Elections*

12.00-13.15pm  Lunch hosted by CDI

13.30pm-16.30pm  The work of the Centre for Democratic Institutions  
*Felicity Pascoe, Executive Officer, CDI*  
The role of Committees and the Executive in the Australian Parliament  
*Dr Ian Marsh, Political Science Program, RSSS, ANU*

17.00pm-18.00pm  Reception at the Vietnamese Embassy.

**Thursday 11 December**
11.30am-13.00pm  Australian Electoral Commission’s Education Program with Shalvey Public School, Chifley electorate, NSW

13.00pm-13.30pm  Debrief and discussion session on the education program with the opportunity to ask questions.  
*Cate Thompson and Judy Kelly*

13.45pm-14.25pm  Lunch at Parliament House

14.30pm-17.00pm  Department of the Parliamentary Library (DPL)  
Induction of new parliamentarians  
*Nola Adcock, Judy Hutchinson, Ian Harris and Cleaver Elliott*