

## Statement on Children's Rights in Vietnam

### AIP Foundation

Hanoi, Vietnam – July 2018

#### Background

Vietnam is a country that has witnessed countless, monumental changes and has made tremendous progress over the past few decades. In the wake of a tumultuous war, as Vietnam opened its doors to the world, it experienced unprecedented economic and political development that would lead to it becoming one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia. AIP Foundation understands that throughout this time, human rights have remained a foremost priority for the Vietnamese government. As an international non-profit organization, AIP Foundation would like to provide the following statement on children's rights within Vietnam from a road safety-focused framework.

#### Best Practices

AIP Foundation believes that every child has the right to health and a safe environment, including the right to protection from air pollution and traffic danger. In the area of human rights, particularly for children, the Vietnamese government has been supportive and proactive in promoting basic rights to health and a safe environment. While much progress has been made, AIP Foundation looks forward to continuing to support Vietnam in promoting and protecting the rights of children.

Every child has the right to use safe roads, yet children are killed or seriously injured on the roads every day.

In 2015, road crashes resulted in approximately 22,000 deaths in Vietnam<sup>1</sup>. Road injuries are the third leading cause of premature death, causing more deaths than lung cancer, tuberculosis, or HIV/AIDS<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 2,000 children die on the roads each year<sup>3</sup>, making it the third leading cause of death among Vietnamese children ages 5–14 (11.71% of total deaths)<sup>4</sup>.

Motorcycles account for 93% of registered vehicles in Vietnam, and their users account for 67% of Vietnam's road crash fatalities<sup>5</sup>. Of these fatalities, nearly 78% are a result of head injury<sup>6</sup>. In 2006, before nationwide mandatory helmet laws, motorcycle helmet use in Vietnam was less than 30% on

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015: Supporting a Decade of Action* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2015), [http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/78256/1/9789241564564\\_eng.pdf](http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/78256/1/9789241564564_eng.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Country Profile: Vietnam Seattle WA: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington; 2017 [Available from: <http://www.healthdata.org/vietnam> accessed 11 Jan 2017].

<sup>3</sup> Vietnamese Traffic Police, 2016. Road Traffic Accident. Press released on February, 2016. Link:

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/2000-children-in-vietnam-die-in-traffic-crashes-a-year-most-without-helmet-59623.html>

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Data Visualization: Vietnam: Both Sexes, 5-14 years, 2015, Deaths Seattle, WA: University of Washington; 2016 [Available from: <http://www.healthdata.org/> accessed 5 Dec 2016. Link: <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/>

<sup>5</sup> Vietnam National Traffic Safety Committee, "Draft 2016 Vietnam National Traffic Safety Committee Traffic Crash Report" (Hanoi, Vietnam, December 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Anh D. Ngo et al., "Road Traffic Related Mortality in Vietnam: Evidence for Policy from a National Sample Mortality Surveillance System," *BMC Public Health* 12, no. 1 (July 27, 2012): 561, doi:10.1186/1471-2458-12-561.

average and just 10% on city roads<sup>7</sup>. Helmet use tended to be higher on roads where use was compulsory<sup>8</sup>.

In December 2007, the Vietnamese government passed Resolution 32, which mandated helmet-wearing for all motorcycle users, helmet use immediately increased to 99%<sup>9</sup>. Helmet use among adults has since remained above 90%<sup>10</sup>, and motorcycle-related fatalities per vehicle have decreased by 46%<sup>11</sup>. Since the enacting the law, AIP Foundation estimates that approximately 5 billion USD has been saved, and nearly 738,848 road injuries and 40,728 fatalities have been prevented<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, the country continues to grapple with the issue of the prevalence of poor-quality helmets, and lower helmet-wearing rates for children compared with adults. The Vietnamese government has taken steps to address these key issues, including declaring 2018 the year of children's traffic safety and conducting an official review of the national standard, and AIP Foundation hopes that these and other stringent regulations will help resolve the problems.

Every child has the right to breathe clean air, yet children are breathing toxic air, impacting their health and future chances in life.

Vietnam is among the top 20 most polluted countries in the world<sup>13</sup>. Air pollution has been shown to have a detrimental effect on health, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, skin diseases, and long-term chronic diseases such as cancer. Several studies have revealed a direct link between exposure to polluted air and increased risk of mortality.

Within Vietnam, the high incidence of fuel combustion engine vehicles such as motorcycles is a significant contributor to the level of pollutants in the air. As the number of privately-owned vehicles increases in tandem with Vietnam's growing middle class, the air quality within urban areas will continue to decrease.

The Vietnamese government is currently working on constructing comprehensive public metro transportation systems in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The metro, once open, will provide an alternative form of transport that is community-focused and environmentally friendly. In addition, if more members of the public begin using the metro as their primary form of transport, the number of privately-owned vehicles may decrease, lowering the amount of pollutants from combustible engines.

Every child has the right to an education, yet many miss out on education due to road traffic crashes.

Through helmet donation programs and public awareness campaigns focused on primary school students, the Vietnamese government and AIP Foundation have collaborated several times to promote

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<sup>7</sup> D V Hung, M R Stevenson, and R Q Ivers, "Prevalence of Helmet Use among Motorcycle Riders in Vietnam," *Injury Prevention* 12, no. 6 (December 1, 2006): 409–13, doi:10.1136/ip.2006.012724; Nguyen Thi Thieng et al., "Helmet Wearing Attitudes and Practices by Motorbike Users: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Public Awareness Campaign" (Hanoi, August 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Hung, Stevenson, and Ivers, "Prevalence of Helmet Use among Motorcycle Riders in Vietnam"; Nguyen Thi Thieng et al., "Helmet Wearing Attitudes and Practices by Motorbike Users: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Public Awareness Campaign."

<sup>9</sup> Jonathon W Passmore et al., "The Formulation and Implementation of a National Helmet Law: A Case Study from Viet Nam," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 88, no. 10 (October 1, 2010): 783–87, doi:10.2471/BLT.09.071662.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015: Supporting a Decade of Action* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2015), [http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/78256/1/9789241564564\\_eng.pdf](http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/78256/1/9789241564564_eng.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Vietnam National Traffic Safety Committee. Fatalities per 10,000 motorcycles were 5.9 in 2007 and 3.2 in 2012.

<sup>12</sup> AIP Foundation calculations based on Asian Development Bank, "Accident Costing Report - Vietnam," 2003; World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015*; Vietnam National Traffic Safety Committee, "2016 Vietnam National Traffic Safety Committee Traffic Crash Report."

<sup>13</sup> Environmental Performance Index (2018).

safe road habits at an early age to vulnerable and at-risk road users. In 2018, the Vietnamese government announced that it will provide helmets for all first-grade students in the country – marking the first time that a helmet donation initiative has been implemented on such a large scale.

In recent years, youth engagement has been another key component of advocating for safer roads in Vietnam. AIP Foundation has worked with university students in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to provide training as road safety ambassadors, who are then empowered to educate others in their own communities. The government continues to express a strong interest in encouraging road safety education as part of a comprehensive curriculum for students, from primary to university levels.

Every child has the right to explore in safety, yet road danger is one of the top barriers for children having the freedom to roam, to play, and to explore.

Every child has the right to protection from violence, so a speed vaccine must be deployed to reduce urban speed limits to safe levels.

To make road environments safer for students commuting to and from school, the government should encourage interventions such as enhancing road infrastructure, increasing public awareness, delivering education, and enforcing speed limits. Recently, the governments in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have demonstrated an interest in creating safer school zones – areas nearby schools where road modifications and lowered speed limits are implemented to create a safer environment. AIP Foundation has partnered with the Vietnamese authorities and other international stakeholders on programs like *Walk This Way* and *Slow Zones, Safe Zones* which promote such interventions.

Every child has the right to be heard.

The Vietnamese government has shown clear support for including children’s voices in policymaking decisions and strategies. AIP Foundation recently mobilized students, teachers, and community leaders across Vietnam in support of the Child Health Initiative’s week of action held from May 21-27. The campaign calls for a first ever summit of world leaders on child and adolescent health in order to re-focus global policy and prioritize youth road deaths and injuries as the health crisis it is. In Vietnam, students and teachers expressed their desire for safer streets by holding signs stating “#ThisIsMyStreet”, to be shared on social media as part of the campaign. members of the Yen Bai Traffic Safety Committee and the Nghia Lo traffic police signed on in support of the campaign, joining communities and NGOs around the world in urging world leaders to ‘walk the talk’ on providing safe environments for children and adolescents.

### **Recommendations**

In order to continue protecting the rights of children as outlined above, AIP Foundation encourages the Vietnamese government to consider the following strategies.

1. Implement stringent, targeted law enforcement to address key risk factors contributing to road injuries and deaths, e.g. quality helmet use, lowered speed limits, and helmet use for children.

Enforcement targeting these risk factors can have a significant effect on reducing road injuries and deaths. The government should therefore allocate resources to ensure that law enforcement bodies have the capacity to fulfill their functions appropriately.

2. Provide public awareness campaigns to maximize dissemination of road safety-related education, including upcoming or recent changes in legislation.

Resolution 32, the decree that mandated helmet use for all motorcycle users, was largely a success due to the comprehensive public awareness campaign, *No Excuses*, that was launched prior to the Resolution becoming effective. Today, many Vietnamese people use new media to communicate in an increasingly technologized world. Expanding public awareness campaigns to utilize features of social media will help spread awareness and education even further.