



Introduction by
The Rt Hon Lord Hurd
of Westwell CH CBE PC
Chairman, FIRST
Advisory Council

The last thirty years have seen great changes in many countries, but nowhere has the transformation been more dramatic than in Vietnam. A country ruined by a most destructive war has restored itself and become a formidable player on the Asian scene. A country under a firmly communist system of government has braced itself to link with the world's free trading system by joining the WTO and has already opened up for trade and investment to a remarkable extent.

Vietnam grew by 8.5 per cent last year and aims for something similar in 2008. Of course, as in most countries there are problems. Inflation is too high, and examples of corruption not hard to find. Nevertheless the determination which the government has shown in carrying Vietnam so far is now being deployed to tackle these problems. Vietnam, like China, looks for a way of giving its citizens a greater say in public policy

within the present political structure. Different models for this process exist among Vietnam's neighbours, for example in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan; but each model develops from its own local history and background and the same will be true of Vietnam. We can be sure that the general direction will be towards enterprise and an open market. Already foreign trade is more important, relatively speaking, for Vietnam than for India or China.

We in Britain are now used to finding attractive and well priced Vietnamese goods in our shops, notably shoes, furniture and clothing. But Vietnam has not until now been a familiar face on the world landscape for most of us in Britain. Only in this century has trade, investment and tourism flourished between our countries. The two countries have a lot to learn about each other and the welcome visit of Prime Minister Dung is a good opportunity to carry this process forward. **F**