

SPECIAL REPORT



Climate counsel

Ms Virginia Foote, President of the US-Vietnam Trade Council Education Forum and President of Vietnam Partners LLC spoke with VET about how climate change has emerged as a part of the Vietnam-US relationship.

■ **Why did the US-Vietnam Trade Council (USVTC) put climate change on its agenda in Vietnam?**

The Trade Council has worked on trade and investment issues between the US and Vietnam for many years. We worked on the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) and then on Vietnam's World Trade Organisation accession. Climate change is obviously an important and priority issue for Vietnam, so we think we can be helpful in the trade and investment side of the issue, with information on what the global standards are going to look like, how negotiations are going, what kinds of financial mechanism are going to be developed, and how climate change is going to affect trade negotiations. It's really the trade and investment side of climate change that we are interested in and that are important for Vietnam in moving forward.

■ **As it is a major, comprehensive issue, what approach will USVTC adopt in discussions with the Vietnamese Government?**

We are looking at the negotiation side, what's happening in global negotiations, what's happening on the US side, how and what climate change issues are coming into trade negotiations and agreements, and looking at what other ways to enhance the BTA to bring clean technologies and best practice to Vietnam with the view towards food security and energy security.

■ **How much could the climate change issue affect trade negotiations between Vietnam and the US?**

It will play a part. The global community is to meet in the Danish capital of Copenhagen at the end of this year to work on the climate change issue. The treaty is still evolving but countries are looking to make commitments over time. There are two areas in climate change. One is adapting to the facts that are coming because of climate change. Vietnam will be among the countries most affected because of rising sea levels. That's a very important issue for the country and relates to food security and its huge popula-

tion. The other side is how to resist and reduce emissions in Vietnam, and the benefit to Vietnam in financial terms from the carbon market and other global standards in attracting more investment.

The Copenhagen negotiations are trying to reach some sort of global consensus on how to address climate change and there are aggressive stances being taken about the consequences of climate change and where countries need help, and that there are to be some mechanisms to generate resources to help affected countries, such as Vietnam. The question is how you can generate and access such resources. That is what the global negotiation is all about.

In bilateral agreements the environment is an important issue for both sides. And so you could discuss how to have tariff negotiations around products that are sensitive to the environment or how to attract investment. I think that is one part of the negotiations.

■ **How does the UVTC's climate change program relate to the climate change agenda of the US Government?**

We are trying to bring in experts and speakers as a way of helping. Maybe we could take a Vietnamese delegation to other countries to look at what they have done, how they have developed their policies, and what incentives have been introduced to attract investments in addressing the issue.

UVTC and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) recently organised a talk and presentation on climate change to representatives from the National Assembly.

■ **What other government offices or State organisations in Vietnam are you planning to work with on the issue?**

There are many ministries involved. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) is obviously the first. But the issue is a priority area for the Prime Minister and Vietnam's leadership. The PM and President Bush signed an MoU in Washington last year. So this is a new area in the bilateral relationship and many different

agencies may become involved. We will work with a range of ministries and departments with responsibilities relating to the issue.

To start with, we will try to assist. If laws are being looked at, we will try to bring in somebody who can provide advice. If policies are being studied, we will bring in experts. We are trying to be a resource to assist the government. The initiatives should come from the Vietnamese side. We are committed to providing assistance.

■ **What do you think about the recent National Target Program on Climate Change Response?**

It's terrific. Every country needs to look at the issue and see what path they can follow to address climate change. Vietnam has worked out an ambitious program. I think it is terrific.

■ **It is an ambitious program, as you say, so what do you see as the greatest barrier to its implementation?**

For all countries, I think the biggest problem is that we all need to change the way we think. It is not an easy process. The pillars of the program are public awareness, human resources, and development. This is a problem that any citizen in any country needs to think about and be part of the solution and try to limit how much they are a part of the problem. I am quite optimistic that this can be good for every economy. There have been a lot of fears expressed that trying to adjust the economy may be harmful. I think that's the wrong way to look at it. I think there have been some examples and pilot projects in a number of countries that show that such activities can be very good for the domestic economy. It is ambitious because we've been part of the problem, so now we all need to be part of the solution.

■ **Does UVTC and Vietnam Partners have a separate budget for the program in Vietnam?**

We have. We are working with the EDF. They have groups of experts that are coming in. We are looking to conduct another workshop this summer. We will raise money. We will design programs.