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Canadians in Vietnam Mean Business ^[1]

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Apart from the Embassy in Hanoi, in Vietnam, Canada has been represented by the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City since 1997. In light of the economic crisis facing the world, Public Affairs efforts have suffered significant budget cuts in most countries' diplomatic offices, and Canada is no exception. Thus, Canada decided to focus on trade and education as the priorities in its official presence and efforts in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Canada has had strong and friendly bilateral relations with Vietnam for 38 years. Canada's Trade Commissioner's Service in Vietnam is helping Vietnamese businesses establish contacts with their Canadian counterparts, and, likewise, the export of Vietnamese companies is facilitated on the account of the existing trade agreements with Canada. The numbers are the best proof of their successful business performance: in the first eight months of 2008, Canadian exports to Vietnam increased 26%, compared to the same period the year before, making it the third fastest growing Canadian export market in Southeast Asia. Canadian companies have found opportunities in Vietnam in a variety of sectors including: agriculture and agri-Food, education and training, forest industries and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Canadian-pledged investment in Vietnam reached \$4.2 billion in the first half of 2008, making it the fifth largest investor in Vietnam. An example of a success is the Canadian company Bombardier that is among the leading aircraft companies selling and leasing their aircrafts to the Vietnamese airline carrier.

Canada has had a long reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR), and their reputation has preceded them to Vietnam. Staff at the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City has recently organized a seminar on CSR where they emphasized the importance of charitable donations and supporting green initiatives, both without a strong footing in Vietnam today.

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is another great example of a job well done by Canadians in Vietnam-CIDA has invested over 30 million dollars in aiding Vietnamese people, especially in reforms for economic growth and poverty reduction, making Vietnam CIDA's country of focus.

Vietnam is a country of 88 million people, 44 million of which are below the age of 30, so it is to no surprise that Canada placed education as one of its top priorities in Vietnam. To Canadians, the image of Vietnam is not as scarred as the image in the minds of Americans, but, on the other hand, Canadians are aware that their nation brand needs improving in Vietnam. They are hoping to increase interest in Canada through education. In early 2007, Canada's Embassy and Consulate General launched a national education campaign to increase the number of Vietnamese students selecting Canada as their top choice for an

international education. In 2009, 707 Vietnamese students obtained study permits to Canada, a 225% increase over 2006. Currently, there are over 1,000 Vietnamese students in Canada. Vietnam is now poised to be in the top 25 foreign student source countries for Canada. The education campaign goals may not be all that altruistic after all. Canada is a vast country with not nearly enough young people of its own, thus encouraging immigration into Canada and hoping for its own rejuvenation.

Another key component in the Canadian public diplomacy efforts in Vietnam is the promotion of Canada in the media: print, television and on the web. It is fair to say that Canada has a good presence in Vietnamese media. Every opportunity to promote the country among Vietnamese is whole heartedly embraced. One such example is the hosting of the Terry Fox Run in Vietnam. Another example of great PD work is the Consul General's regular appearances on the local children's TV show equivalent to Sesame Street, where the Consul General talks about Canada, its people and customs. This is just another example where cultural diplomacy efforts, no matter how small the scale, go a long way.

Though one cannot escape the impression that Canadians everywhere suffer from an inferiority complex in relation to their better known neighbor, it is evident in Vietnam that they have managed to step out of the American shadow through their public diplomacy efforts.

Emina Vukic, in March 2010, participated in a research trip to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which was partially funded by the USC Master of Public Diplomacy program and the Dean's office of the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. Emina is a first-year Master of Public Diplomacy student. Born and raised in Croatia, former Yugoslavia, she was subjected to ethnic cleansing in Croatia and had a refugee status for eight years. Before attending USC, Emina worked for the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia, the Hague Tribunal office in Belgrade and the USAID Local Government Reform Program in Serbia. Her public diplomacy interests lie in nation branding, primarily of the post conflict countries through cultural diplomacy efforts.
