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Report from the Gymnastic and Sport Federation  
of Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

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## PART I: Status of Sport and Physical Activities in Viet Nam

Different countries have different situations and conditions, as for Viet Nam, a country of over 80 million people who are still tackling with many basic social problems, like food, water, and air pollution, physical exercises appear to be a luxurious items for many people. In Viet Nam, the people (and even the highest government officials) do not seem to discriminate the difference between sport and physical education. All sport activities lie under the Ministry of Cultural – Sport and Tourism. Physical Education in schools lie under the Ministry of Education and Training, which only concern and organize sport competitive activities, and spend very little time and budget for physical education activities for their students.

The Ministry of Education and Training in Viet Nam does not seem to pay much concern about physical education. Schools of all levels do not reserve time in their curriculum for physical education, but they do organize competitive sport games (like soccer, volley ball, basket ball...) for their students. Once or twice a year, the schools conduct PE examination for their students to take the students' marks as one of their academic grades.

To make it short, the Vietnamese people mistake sport and physical education. They think that playing sport is building good health. They do not realize that in order to be champion in sport they must have good health, and in order to have good health they have to do physical exercise, and physical education must be conducted in school of all levels, from kindergarten to university. Most schools do not have any kind of facilities for their students to do physical exercises, no campus, no gyms, no courts, no yards... Without physical education in schools, there would be no young healthy generation to be made athletes for competitive sport. Playing competitive sports (like soccer, boxing, etc...) without having good physical condition could bring serious accidents and even disability or death.

To make it short, Vietnamese people like sports but do not realize that they need to build up their health through physical exercises. The student generations are not given opportunity to develop their physical condition or sport talents in schools. As a

consequence, the people's health index have not improved, and the national athletes have gained very low ranking even in Asian Games, and almost none in Olympic Games; and the people will continue to "play" sports through watching TV or reading the newspapers.

Public facilities for competitive sports are available in all parts of the country, but not sufficient and adequate (soccer fields, basket ball court, volley ball yard, swimming pools...) but facilities for physical activities are only in big cities, mostly private owned (gyms in luxurious hotels for instant) and almost none in the rural areas. Public parks in big cities have been shrinking in number due to the new building projects to cope with the exploding population. This unfavorable condition has given the young people very little choice to improve their health or develop their sport talents.

### Trends and challenges

The unfavorable situation of sports and physical education is a national problem which can only be solved by the highest authority of the country. I believe that physical education is a must for the young generation of any country, unless there are healthy people, there would be no strong athletes. I believe that the nation can be strong only if the young generations are strong. The challenge is this concept must be understood and acted upon by the government. It should be realized that the ultimate goal of sport and physical exercise is to develop the people's health and not to win medals at sport games.

Unless this concept is understood and accepted by the authoritative people, there would be no chance to upgrade the people health.

The optimistic trends are that the people have begun to realize the importance of physical exercises, more people begin to pay money to do exercises in private gyms, more people begin to do "health preservation" activities, like yoga, tai chi, physical exercises in public places. The few remaining public parks are now packed with people, mostly old aged people, during early morning hours and late at night. Ironically, the young generation do not seem to enjoy these physical activities; instead many students are paying to use private mini soccer fields, paid swimming pools, paid tennis courts, paid etc...

The government has been trying to encourage the people to invest in organizing private sector sport teams (soccer, badminton, volley ball, tennis...) but only in big cities. The rural areas are still left without much concern.

### Activities initiated from the Gymnastic and Sport Federation of Ho Chi Minh City

Our Federation has been operating under the supervision of the government Sport Department of HCM City. We have been trying to do as much as we could within our limited ability. Our mission is very clear: to make sure everybody does physical exercises to improve their health for a better life. To express this concept and turn it

into action, we have organized a Performance Group to travel and visit places like schools, universities, provinces... to put on performances of physical exercises, such as aerobic, cheerleading, acrobatic, aesthetic, dancing, and even tai chi, yoga for the old aged people. Everywhere we went, the only message is urging people of all ages to do physical exercise, any kind that is suitable for the individual. These demonstration tours have been very successful, all the people seemed to enjoy watching them, however, how many of them have started to practice physical exercises after watching, I would not know.

## PART II: Our proposal

To make the people understand and believe the importance of physical exercises is not difficult, but to make them turn this into action is another story. Usually they would claim that they do not have time, actually they are lazy; and then the next excuses would be there are no appropriate places for them to do physical exercises; no equipments, no trainers.. they would finally come up with one last excuse that they are too busy to work for a living. Please remember that I am talking about Vietnamese people and Vietnamese culture.

I believe in conducting constant motivation, encouragement, creating opportunities for them to enjoy participating in physical exercises; and since this problem is a matter of self realization, self recognition and may be some day they suddenly realize that physical exercises are much more effective to improve their health than medication; only at that time would they voluntarily try to preserve their own health through practicing physical exercises.

If I can make a proposal to ISCA to help improve the health situation in Viet Nam, I would like to mention the opportunity ISCA would give the young generation to see the good people live a good healthy life, to learn the skill to motivate and guide the public to participate in physical exercises, to learn about good nutrition, and most of all to learn how a modern country would conduct physical education for their young generation, improving their people's health index.

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