



**United Nations  
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pour la population**

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## Viet Nam's sexual health services an example for Europe, says Irish MP

**HAI PHONG**, Viet Nam – European donor countries can learn from Viet Nam in providing sexual and reproductive health information and services for young people, an Irish member of parliament said during a 2-day study tour to the port city of Hai Phong.



Photo: UNFPA - 2006

Senator Mary Henry was one of seven European parliamentarians introduced to Viet Nam's youth-friendly health services, set up over the past three years with support from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) totalling US\$2.4 million.

"Most social problems are international," Henry said after seeing a rural counselling and service centre for young people in Tan Phong commune, on the outskirts of Viet Nam's third-most populous city.

"We have nothing like this in our countries. We will learn a lot that we may be able to apply when we return home to our countries. We could look on the money that we have given as an investment for what we can do at home," she said.

The centre she and the other parliamentarians visited is like the 21 others around seven provinces in Viet Nam, created as part of a regional joint EU-UNFPA initiative to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people in seven Asian countries, the RHIYA programme.

The "youth-friendly corner" concept is simple: create a comfortable space young people can access easily, and where they can get information, confidential counselling, services and contraceptives when they want or need them.

The colourful decor of Viet Nam's youth-friendly corners is designed and created by local youngsters, who also use the corners as a place to meet up with friends.

### MUTUAL LEARNING

Like many others, the youth-friendly corner visited by the European parliamentarians at the end of November is integrated into the commune health centre.

The facilities here are basic, and include a single birthing chair and a medicine cabinet with scarce supplies. After labour, women can relax on a bamboo mat in an adjacent recovery ward.

So far this year, 79 women have come here to give birth. Of these, 40 have been referred to a bigger and better-equipped health facility some 5 km down a dirt road.

Seeing the facilities, Henry, who is a medical doctor, said Viet Nam "may consider" looking to Europe and ensuring women feel comfortable when delivering by allowing them to give birth in more natural positions than allowed by the restrictive birthing chair.



Photo : UNFPA -2006