Indiana University’s Center on Southeast Asia hosted a conference at the Lilly Corporate Center in Indianapolis on April 23 to discuss U.S.-Vietnam relations. Nearly 150 business, education, and civic leaders attended.

Among the strong lineup of speakers at the conference were Ambassador Le Van Bang from the Embassy of Vietnam; Karen Goddin, executive director of the US-ASEAN Council; Gen. John Vessey, U.S. Army, Ret.; Simon Bradden, country manager—Vietnam, Eli Lilly & Co.; and, John Rau, dean of the IU School of Business.

The speakers noted that Vietnam is growing rapidly but still faces major challenges. The country has a population of 73 million, but nearly half its people are under the age of 15. The majority of people in Vietnam are poor and rural. Average yearly income is about $250, with most city residents earning substantially more than their countryside counterparts.

And yet, despite widespread poverty and large income disparities, approximately 90 percent of Vietnam’s populace is literate. The many young people in Vietnam, it would seem, are very interested in education and in learning.

Investors are increasingly attracted to Vietnam’s highly literate and motivated work force, and hard-working young populace. At present, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan are the largest foreign investors in Vietnam, but the U.S. is catching up quickly. Presently, it ranks sixth.

Just days before the conference began, the United States opened a “Foreign and Commercial Office” in Hanoi.

For more information about the related activities, contact the Center on Southeast Asia at (317) 274-2735; fax: (317) 278-2213.

— Marjorie A. Lyles
Director
Center on Southeast Asia, IUPUI