



United Nations

Working for Lao PDR

Issue 1/2010

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## Lao PDR Takes Lead on the Convention on Cluster Munitions

From the 8th to 12th November 2010 Lao PDR will host the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The Convention opened for signature in Oslo in December 2008 and 106 states signed. It took only 14 months to reach the 30 ratifications required to come into force, with Burkina Faso and Moldova signing in February 2010. This was a very swift pace compared to other international treaties, and the Convention will be officially adopted on the 1st August 2010.

The Convention is a legally binding instrument that prohibits the development, use and stockpiling of cluster munitions, whilst securing adequate provision of care and rehabilitation to survivors and clearance of contaminated areas.

The First Meeting of States Parties will lay the foundation for future engagement on the Convention by bringing together the States Parties to the Convention, UN agencies, international organisations, civil society, and cluster bomb survivors. The participating members will share progress and plans for implementation, with the aim of drawing up a blueprint to translate the treaty into action.

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## 1st States Parties Meeting 2010: Lao PDR Taking International Lead

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# No More Cluster Munitions

## Vientiane 2010

During its 64th session in 2009, the UN General Assembly (GA) welcomed the offer of the Government of the Lao PDR to host the meeting. It is rare that a developing country, especially a Least Developed Country, hosts a meeting of this calibre.

This highlights the extent of the Government's political commitment to invest even more efforts to an issue that has left a deadly legacy and hinders the country's efforts of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and exiting the status of Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2020.

### Poverty and Cluster Munitions

There is a clear correlation between Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) contamination and prevalence of poverty. Even decades after the war ended, UXO continues to present a major humanitarian and socio-economic challenge to the country.

As well as causing deaths and injuries, UXO limits safe access to potentially rich agricultural land and adds to the cost of development programmes when land needs to be cleared. With about 80 percent of Laos' workforce engaged in the agricultural sector the impact is significant and it is no surprise that the heaviest price of UXO is paid by those in rural areas.

Many people injured by UXO incidents get trapped in a cycle of poverty. Often they can no longer work and as a result their children may end up dropping out of school, one of the core foundations of ensuring opportunities in society.

Natural disasters, such as flooding, can create yet more challenges, with UXO moving from identified areas to previously unaffected rice fields and roads. This was the case when Typhoon Ketsana struck southern Laos in September 2009. As a result the lives of yet more people are negatively impacted.

But with the Convention on Cluster Munitions coming into force, people from all the affected provinces in Lao PDR can have hope of being able to farm their land, send their children to school and walk to the market without fear. The key aspects of the Convention accounts for some

of the critical issues related to poverty reduction (MDG1 - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), and would play a major role for Lao PDR in its aspiration to graduate from the LDC status by 2020.

The strength of the Convention is its detailed way of defining the victims of cluster munitions. Being a victim not only means being killed or physically injured, but also includes psychological injuries, economic loss, as well as restriction of movement and lack of access to basic needs. The Convention also takes a clear stand on age- and gender-sensitive victim assistance, including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support, whilst providing social and economic inclusion for all victims.

### Strong UN Partnership with the Government

The 2008 UXO sector evaluation shows that Lao PDR can clear the contamination from priority agricultural land in 16 years at present capacity. By scaling up resources, the prospects could be even quicker, perhaps 10 years. In light of this, a new 10-year strategy has been developed, with a vision of Lao PDR free from the threat of UXO, this is now in the process of endorsement from the Government.

However a lot of work remains to be done, with 78 million sub munitions and more than 400 000 big bombs unexploded. According to UXO Lao estimates, since 1996 they've cleared 0.57% of the total known sub munitions and 1.2% of the total known big bombs.

If the roving team capacity is scaled up UXO Lao can reduce its response time to a few days from weeks and prevent more victims. In addition more collaboration with other clearance organizations would be possible to expand operations to areas in need.

To support the full implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in the Lao PDR, the Government set up a UXO trust fund on March 5th 2010, supported by UNDP. In the framework of the Vientiane Declaration on aid effectiveness, the fund provides a One Stop Shop for donors assuring better coordination and predictability in funding. The UN will support the operation of the trust fund in ensuring best use of funds towards the key programmes.

*"They started picking up things on the ground that they threw at each other. Kee, the youngest girl, saw something different from the rocks and picked it up – a metal ball with interesting features! They all got excited about the new "ball" they had and started playing catch with it. After a few minutes, the metal "ball" went off. Unknowingly, what Kee picked up was a sub-munition from a cluster bomb that was dropped during the Vietnam War."*

*Mr. Hongkham Chanhthavongsa, Savannakhet province*



### 1st States Parties Meeting 2010: Preventing the Use of Cluster Munitions

*Between years 1964 and 1973, over 270 million cluster sub-munitions were dropped on Laos. With an average failure rate of 30 %, approximately 80 million remained in the country after the war. All 17 provinces of Lao PDR are UXO contaminated.*

# Lacing Her Boots to Clear the Fields

Thirty-one year old Keophimpa Chansima has unique tools of trade, a metal detector and shovel, wire cutters, a kilometre's worth of electrical wire, detonators, TNT, C4 explosives, and an exploder. Her job is to supervise a team of ten clearing unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Attapeu province, Lao PDR.

She applied for a job as a de-miner in 1999 with UXO Lao, the national UXO clearance operator. After being accepted as a trainee, Keophimpa was sent on an eight-week training course at the UXO Lao training centre in Vientiane, which prepared her for the challenges ahead.

"During the first time in a real UXO clearance site, I was excited as I started swinging my detector looking for UXO underneath the surface of the ground. I was not afraid when I found my first UXO item because I knew I passed the course and I had confidence in myself to handle it. I knew that once I have cleared this UXO item out of the field, it would create a safe environment for people living in the area."

Ten years later an opportunity arose to be a team leader. After being promoted in 2009, Keophimpa is now an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technician, level 3, and can safely handle, remove, and destroy almost all types of UXO.

When asked about her plans for the future, "I may have finished only upper secondary school but I would like to become a Senior EOD like the other female Senior EOD's working in Champasack province. I want to continue working for UXO Lao until clearance operations are finally over in Lao. I want the Lao people to live their lives in safety."

Photo: UXO Lao/Khammane Bounyavong



**Educating about Risks**



**Clearing Land**



**Collecting Information**



**Supporting Survivors**

**Cluster Munitions and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Affect Lives, Food Security and Hinder Socio-Economic Development. We Work Towards Better Human Development in the Lao PDR**



Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, European Commission, France, Germany, Intrepid Foundation, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Poland, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, UNDP, UNICEF, World Without Mines

## MDG Summit 2010: International Call to Ending Poverty, 5 years to achieve the MDGs

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, has called on world leaders to attend a summit in New York in September 2010 to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. 189 countries signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000 setting 8 goals.

# MDG 2: Fulfilling the Right to Education of Every Child

The Lao PDR spends around 12% of its total public spending on education. This number is relatively low by regional standards, but the prospects for improvement seem good with Government revenues increasing.

As noted in the 2009 Round Table Implementation meeting, primary net enrolment rates have increased from 80% in 2001 to 91.6% today. The target of 2010 is 98%. A Government priority is to reach the almost 10% of children who remain outside the schooling system. This aim is very much in line with UNESCO's Global Education for All Monitoring Report for 2010, addressing the question of 'reaching the unreached', and it is also contributing towards MDG2, achieving universal primary education.

In terms of policy, the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF), finalized late 2009, provides an overarching policy framework that lays out clear priorities and targets to improve equitable education access, quality and efficiency, and to strengthen education sector governance and performance management between now and 2015.

The framework has also provided a clear roadmap to guide domestic and external investments in the whole sector and support a more coordinated, programmatic approach to planning.

### Challenges of Secondary School Remain

The donor assistance, consistent with education policy, has focused on basic education since the year 2000.

Lao PDR is now facing a situation that has been observed in other Asian and African developing countries as well: a policy dilemma of being under pressure for secondary and post-secondary schooling before universal primary enrolment has been achieved.

It remains a reality that teaching and learning in Lao Secondary schools happens under difficult conditions. The average size of a class in Lao PDR secondary schools is currently 50 compared to 37 ten years ago.

### Rural Girls with Poor Nutrition and Food Security Face More Risks than Others

According to the Global Education for All Monitoring Report 2010, there are still at least 72 million children worldwide who remain out of school because of where they live or their family

background.

In the Lao PDR, the enrolment rates of boys and girls in rural areas are much lower than their urban peers. Gender parity in enrolments has increased steadily, though disparities seem to widen at each step of the educational ladder. The share of girls aged 7-16 with no education is relatively low at 6.1%, but this increases to 20% for poorer girls in rural areas.

Unfortunately, the rate of child stunting, holding back progress in education, is relatively high in the Lao PDR at 40%. By the time children enter school, malnutrition has diminished their potential to learn, and this will affect them through to adulthood. The correlation between nutrition, food security and education is growing stronger with current research.

When it comes to nutrition on a global level, the trend is clear: nutritional indicators show deterioration in many countries over the past two years. Recent estimates from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) suggest that the number of malnourished people in the world increased from 848 million in 2005 to

963 million in 2008, largely because of rising food prices. This may have contributed to a further 44 million people becoming malnourished in 2008.

*"Opportunities for education are heavily influenced by the well-being of children before they enter school. It is an unfortunate fact that, at the start of the twenty-first century, the twin scourges of hunger and ill health continue to blight education on a global scale."*

*Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2010*

### The Way Forward: Using Scarce Funds Effectively

As recently concluded in an evaluation by UNDP, *Mid-Point: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, a serious challenge facing the least developed countries in particular is fiscal constraint.

According to the report, limitations in funding affect the ability of countries to scale up public expenditures required for investing in MDG outcomes, such as achieving universal primary education. For countries that are aid dependant, both higher levels of Official Development Aid (ODA) in the medium term and enhanced aid effectiveness are needed to accelerate MDG progress.

In 2009, Lao PDR received USD 560 million in aid. In support of the 7th NSEDP (National Socio-Economic Development Plan), an important outcome of the UN work was to place strong emphasis on investments in the social sectors, equity issues and achievement and integration of MDGs into the Plan.

## MDG Summit 2010: Reaching the Goals

*The achievement of MDGs requires an unprecedented pace of progress in most countries. The fact that many countries are on track to achieve a significant number of the goals will transform the quality of life for hundreds of millions of people.*

With the high-level Round Table Meeting approaching in October 2010, the Education Sector Working Group has planned a full programme of work, including five-year implementation plans of the Education Sector Development Framework to provide inputs into the 7th NSEDP and dissemination of the strategy framework to local levels.

The Ministry of Education has exercised strong leadership to facilitate a robust policy dialogue with development partners and as a result, the education sector is witnessing improved stakeholder coordination and reduced fragmentation

As noted in the Round Table implementation meeting of 2009, the shared aim of the Government and Development Partners is to maximize impact and achieve the goal of ensuring that everyone in Lao PDR can enjoy their right to access quality education.

### **Round Table Meeting Translates Policies to Action**

In addition to preparing for the New York MDG Summit in September, Lao PDR is preparing for the high-level Round Table Meeting on October 27th 2010 in Vientiane. The meeting provides an arena for stakeholder discussions on the direction of development, and also for mobilizing resources to achieve the country's development goals.

As part of the ongoing consultation process, the draft English version of the Executive Summary of the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) and the full Lao edition was sent by the Government to Development Partners in May 2010. This is the first time in history that a draft NSEDP has been shared with Development Partners to such an extent and represents a significant step forward in the continuing cooperation between Government and Development Partners.

This year's high-level Round Table meeting is particularly important, and will provide an opportunity for Development Partners to commit resources and reiterate their continued support of the Government in their aims of achieving the MDGs, exiting Least Developed Country status by 2020, and meeting the targets and objectives that will be set-out in the 7th Plan.

# MDG 5: Reducing Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality ratio in Lao PDR is high, with 660 deaths per 100 000 live births (2005). The figure is second highest in the Asia-Pacific region.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with other development partners, supports the Lao Ministry of Health for the re-institution of the professional midwife training programme after a gap of more than two decades. The programme will support eight provincial schools to upgrade the classrooms, offices, skills laboratories and libraries in order to commence the

Community Midwife Programme.

On April 28th a group of parliamentarians participated in a study visit to Khammouane Provincial Health School, central Lao. The School receives technical and financial support, as well as significant teaching and learning materials from UNFPA.

One of the delegates present at the visit, Ms Chieko Nohno, a Senator from Japan, who is also a former midwife, acknowledged the significance of the school for reducing maternal and child deaths and disabilities. She emphasized, "The importance and need for skilled and competent midwives to achieving the MDGs, in particular MDG5, improve maternal health."

Ever since she was a young girl, Mrs. Bounma Kingsalath dreamed of becoming a midwife. In 1971 she moved from Hin Boun, a small village, to Vientiane capital with the firm purpose of joining the Midwifery Training Program to help women of her community give birth safely. In 20 years as a midwife she assisted around 6000 childbirths. This experience led her to become the Deputy Director of the Khammouane Province School of Health, where she taught Maternal and Newborn Health for 17 years to technical nurses and other students.

Kingsalath retired a few months ago, after a 37-year career in maternal health. She knows very well the benefits of midwifery, her own babies were delivered by colleague midwives. She is convinced her work "can help to reduce the death of mothers and newborns in remote areas."

Photo: UNFPA Lao PDR /Diego De La Rosa

## MDG Summit 2010: Lao PDR to be Showcased

The Government of Lao PDR will present its MDG acceleration framework and costing at the summit in September, reaffirming its commitment to achieve the MDGs and highlighting its efforts as best practice.

# MDG 7: Managing Natural Resources for Environmental Sustainability

Climate change has been a major priority of the Secretary-General since the very beginning of his tenure and in April 2007 the United Nations Chief Executive Board (CEB) launched its initiative on climate change.

Since then the CEB has embarked on a major effort to align the strengths of the UN system organizations to achieve a coordinated, action-oriented approach to MDG7, to ensure environmental sustainability.

Lao PDR signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1995 and the Kyoto Protocol in 2003 but the recent increase in economic activities linked to the country's natural resources has had an impact on environmental quality. Higher living standards ultimately require the sustainable use of natural resources, but the trajectory of economic development and population growth can threaten the availability of clean land, forests and water.

Climate change has become a reality, impacting adversely on environment, food and water, and also security, population and health. Extreme weather patterns are more frequent, with the impact of Typhoon Ketsana in September 2009 still being felt.

Environmental conditions and access to natural resources and other environmental services are closely linked to the livelihoods, health and vulnerability of people living in poverty, particularly women and children.

### *Creating National Strategies*

To tackle these issues the Prime Minister established the National Steering Committee on Climate Change (NSCCC) and the Climate Change Office (CCO) in May 2008 to coordinate the development of a national strategy to manage climate change and its impacts.

To support the government the Poverty-Environment Initiative, (PEI) a joint effort led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP) strengthens the

capacity of central and provincial authorities in recognizing climate-induced vulnerabilities and managing adaption actions.

This resulted in the signing of the National Adaption Program of Action (NAPA) in 2009. The plan addresses the immediate and urgent needs related to the adverse effects of climate change in key sectors such as agriculture, forestry, water resources, and human health.

In addition a new initiative was formally approved with the Water Resources and Environment Administration (WREA) in late 2008, to develop the Second National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

### *Integrating Poverty-Environment Concerns to Policies*

UNDP has been working with the government to develop a comprehensive and consolidated response to national climate change challenges. This work at policy level will ensure that the links between poverty and environment are considered at all stages of key development planning processes, such as the 7th National Socio-Economic Plan, 2011 – 2015.

The UN response to climate change in Lao PDR is truly within the spirit of 'Delivering as One'. In April 2010 an Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting on Population and Development, facilitated by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), focused on the theme of population and adaption to climate change. The work of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also addresses many important climate change related issues, such as food security and sustainable natural resources management.

The UN family will continue its close collaboration with the Government of the Lao PDR to ensure that the ever evolving impacts of climate change are managed in a coordinated and effective way to benefit those most affected.

## MDG Summit 2010: Lao PDR Committed to Achieving the MDGs

By investing in the social sector and addressing inequality in growth, the Government of Lao PDR highlights its commitment to achieving the MDGs in its 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

# MDG 1: School Meals for a Brighter Future

Lao PDR has taken an important step towards eradicating hunger and achieving universal primary education: initiating the gradual transfer of all school meals activities to the government. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed earlier this year between the Lao Ministry of Education (MoE), the World Bank and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

Currently, the WFP-assisted School Meals Programme supports more than 132,000 students and their families in remote, food insecure areas of Laos. Schoolchildren receive a nutritious mid-morning snack every day at school and at the end of the year get to take home rations of rice, fish and salt to share with their families.

School meals and take-home rations work as an incentive for both children and their parents, adding to and reinforcing the value of education. They help to improve the nutritional status of whole families both in the short and long term. Ultimately, education helps to break the cycle of poverty - educated children grow into men and women who produce and earn more, and who are more likely to send their own children to school.

Mr Lytou, Vice-Minister of Education, has seen the impact of the programme over many years: "Since its start in 2002, School Meals has proved crucial in encouraging primary school children from rural areas to attend school and receive an education. For this reason the Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring that these benefits will be sustained over the long run through government implementation", he said. In a pilot project starting in 2010, MoE will manage school meals activities in two districts, while WFP will continue to support all other target schools in Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Oudomxay, Saravane, Sekong, and Attapeu.

Photo: WFP Lao PDR /Cornelia Pätz

## In Brief: UN in Lao PDR

### UN Showing Commitment

The International Day for Mine Action and Victim Assistance was celebrated on April 4th with a symbolic march along the main avenue of Vientiane. H.E Lieutenant-General Douangchay Phichith, Deputy Prime Minister and the UN Resident Coordinator Sonam Yangchen Rana led the group together.

In her speech, Ms Yangchen Rana emphasized that "Having to live a life in an environment that is dangerous and even deadly is not acceptable – not for anyone. And this why we are here today, showing our commitment to continue the battle against UXO and cluster munitions".

Photo: UNDP Lao PDR/Julie Mehigan

### Royal Guest at UN House

His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Al-Hussein of Jordan visited Lao PDR in his role as a Special Envoy for the 1997 Mine Ban Convention. During his visit, he took part in a signing ceremony between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Australia's (AusAID), who committed further financial support to the UXO sector in Laos.

Through the recently established UXO trust fund, by the Government of Lao PDR and UNDP, Australia (AusAID) will support the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) and UXO Lao with total funding of USD 2,313,100. Australia's support will cover a wide range of programme activities that respond to the needs identified in the 2008 UXO sector evaluation and also to assist the Government of Lao PDR in fulfilling its important role for the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Mr Javier Barrantes, Deputy Resident Representative, Operations (on the left) welcomed Prince Mired Raad Al-Hussein (on the right) to UN House.

Photo: UNDP Lao PDR/Phoutsavong Phatsouda



United  
Nations

# Working for Lao PDR

## MDG Summit 2010: Achieving an Action Agenda to Achieve the MDGs

*"We must not fail the billions who look to the international community to fulfill the promise of the Millennium Declaration for a better world. Let us meet in September to keep the promise." UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon*

## MDG 3: Gender Equality is Good Economics

The 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report *Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific* states that, "Lack of women's participation in the workforce across Asia Pacific costs the region an estimated USD 89 billion every year."

In Lao PDR the agricultural labour force is 53% female, but only 7% of farms are women-headed, compared to 20% in most other regions of the world. However, amongst parliamentarians, Lao PDR has one of the highest rates in the region, with 25.2% being female.

According to Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, "Removing barriers to women's ownership of assets, such as land; expanding paid employment; making migration safe and investing in high-quality education and health are some of the main solutions recommended for addressing the problems in the region."

In Lao PDR there are positive signs, a national law states that men and women are equally entitled to hold property and any property purchased during marriage is regarded as jointly owned. Land owned by a woman prior to her marriage remains hers, as does any land she inherits from her parents.

The establishment of UN Women, a new UN entity, highlights the importance attached to accelerating the empowerment of women and girls. The new body will work to create a much stronger voice for women and for gender equality at the global level. As the UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, says, "achieving gender equality promotes human development – not only for women, but for whole societies and it is central to achieving the MDGs."

## The United Nations Country Team Commitment to the Lao PDR

*"The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government to improve the life of all citizens, especially those most vulnerable. We shall continue to work closely with the Government and all development partners for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Our collective endeavour is to assist the people of Lao PDR to achieve progress and better standards of living for all."*

United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Lao PDR 2007-2011

## Contact the UN in the Lao PDR

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**Resident agencies:** FAO, ILO, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNIFEM, UNODC, UNV, WFP and WHO

**Non-resident agencies:** IFAD, ITC, OHCA, OHCHR, UNCRD, UNCTAD, UNESCO and UNHCR

**Close collaboration:** Asian Development Bank, UNESCAP, IMF, World Bank