UN Statement for the 2018 Round Table Implementation Meeting: Outcomes 1 and 3
(Time for delivery: 5 minutes)

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- I would like to deliver this intervention on behalf of the UN Country Team.

[Economic Outcome]

- Building on the high growth rates over the past years, Lao PDR has for the first time reached the threshold for graduation from Least Developed Country status. To sustain the positive trend and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, existing limitations need to be addressed.

- The discussions leading up to this round table meeting have recognized critical priorities for the second half of the eighth NSEDP and for the ninth planning cycle. We join the partners who have highlighted the importance of strengthening accountability mechanisms, enforcing the rule of law and developing capacities at all levels. Inclusive and sustainable growth will also require better regional integration, the improvement of the business environment - for small and medium enterprises in particular - and a levelling of the playing field. These measures will be critical for enabling more productive local investment, attracting quality foreign direct investment and modernizing and diversifying the economy, which in turn will create new jobs, increase incomes and enhance the fiscal space. In this context, we commend
the ongoing efforts to enhance tax collection, strengthen public financial management systems, and better link budgeting to planning.

- The strong economic growth has been accompanied by an ongoing but still fragile development of labour market institutions. Significant decent work challenges remain, particularly those related to high levels of vulnerability and informality, as well as to low skill levels. A large part of the population lacks access to adequate protection. This is especially true for people working in the informal and rural economies who are unable to contribute to formal social security arrangements.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

- Lao PDR is in pole position to benefit from the demographic dividend, with the share of the working-age population significantly larger than the non-working-age share. According to projections, this window of opportunity will close by 2050. The full benefits of the demographic dividend will only be realized if new jobs keep pace with the growth of the working age population, and if young women and men are better equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge.

- Agriculture is critical for poverty reduction and inclusive growth. Targeting resources to enhance equity and sustainability within the ongoing transition towards commercial agriculture, increase agricultural capacities, and develop higher quality value chains would benefit the majority of the rural population and lead to improved employment opportunities, food security and access to economic and social benefits. Investing in nutrition-sensitive value chains—
especially market-oriented production and processing of diverse foods for local markets - will improve access to nutritious foods for all communities and improve health and nutrition over time, reducing the economic burden that malnutrition poses.

[Environmental Outcome]

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

• Climate change poses a significant risk to agricultural development, with an increase in frequency and intensity of droughts, storms and floods - as we have seen this year. We therefore welcome the emphasis put on climate-resilient agricultural systems, disaster risk reduction and green growth. The increase in natural disasters also calls for a more comprehensive investment in the environment.

• The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment has revealed the magnitude of damages and losses and estimated the recovery needs at around half a billion US Dollars. It will be important to maintain the momentum towards the delivery of a comprehensive recovery framework, bringing the sectors together to build back better, enhance safety mechanisms to reduce the exposure to the impacts of future disasters and enhance the protection of the most vulnerable populations.

• The UN Team stands ready to continue its joint support to these critical priorities.