UN Statement for the
2018 Round Table Implementation Meeting:
Outcome 2
(Time for Delivery: 6 minutes)

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

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

- We commend the Government on the important steps taken towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as evidenced by the successful review on graduation from Least Developed Country status, the Mid-Term Review of the 8th NSEDP, and the Voluntary National Review, through which Lao PDR show-cased its lessons learned to other UN member states.

- Measuring our progress towards development milestones has been enabled by reliable, timely and available data and statistics, which allow us to monitor progress; take decisions that are based on evidence; and - where data is disaggregated – to identify those groups who are most disadvantaged and thus require our support first.

- The disaggregated data that is available shows that while the overall situation in the country has improved, inequalities persist - in particular between urban and rural areas and within urban areas. An adolescent girl in Phongsaly province will be significantly more likely to be poor and will have less access to quality services than an adolescent girl in Vientiane.
• In this regard, important steps also remain to be taken towards gender equality and women’s empowerment - increasing the number of women in leadership and enhancing women’s livelihoods and economic opportunities. The UN remains committed to support the Government on these priorities, as well as in addressing early marriage, teen pregnancy and gender-based violence.

• Children are also among those most left behind. The recent Report on “SDGs and Children - Measuring Progress on Child Wellbeing” has found that a majority of children are multi-dimensionally deprived.

• The discussions under the first, economic outcome of the 8th NSEDP have resulted in important recommendations in reducing inequalities, including on ensuring better allocation, expenditure and distribution of the budget amongst priority sectors. Strengthening national and sub-national planning, budgeting and coordination will also be important, as the Government starts planning for the 9th NSEDP. We hope the next NSEDP will be more closely linked to the sectoral strategies, and to the budget.

[Food Security and Nutrition]

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

• The continued progress on reducing poverty and malnutrition indicates that past investments have paid off. Stunting for instance has been reduced from 44 percent to 33 percent over the past five years. However, some geographic areas and population groups remain vulnerable. While national food security
is a strong achievement, food insecurity is a daily challenge for 11 percent of rural households – and access to diverse foods remains difficult in many communities, especially in Phongsaly, Bokeo, Houaphanh and Sekong provinces. Lao PDR has still to achieve the target of reducing undernutrition due to a number of inter-related causes, such as poor infant and young child feeding practices, poor maternal nutrition and high adolescent birth rates.

[Education]

- Improving access to food and addressing nutrition alone is not enough. While steady progress has been made in increasing enrolment in early childhood education and lower-secondary education, persistent disparities remain across all the level of education. Continued investments in access and quality of education, including non-formal education and TVET, will be required to ensure all people can develop to their fullest potential and contribute positively to the economy.

[Health]

- In the health sector, a tax-based health insurance scheme has been launched to cover the informal sector. This is an important step towards reducing financial hardship on households and reaching Universal Health Coverage. Close monitoring over the next years will ensure the scheme promotes equitable access to services. We are encouraged to see Lao PDR’s commitment to an enabling environment for women and men, including youth and those living in remote areas, to access quality family planning services and contraceptives. This will ensure that every woman can choose when and how many children to have. While adequate allocation towards all
social sectors is critical, it will be particularly important to ensure at least 9% of the budget is allocated to the health sector. External funding is expected to decrease over the next years, while the utilization of health services under the National Health Insurance and the cost of medical technology will put additional pressure on the budgets.

[WASH]

- With access to health services and practices improving, many households and villages continue to be affected by lack of access to quality water and sanitation. Investments in this area will over time reduce the pressure on health expenditure.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

- Building on the diversity of expertise of its agencies, the UN Team stands ready to continue to support Lao PDR in reducing poverty and improving access to quality services, in particular for those most left behind. Thank you for your attention.