



Press Release

For immediate release

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Women candidates are ready to compete for Lao National Assembly seats

Lao women candidates have been trained how to successfully compete for seats at the National Assembly (NA), 6th Legislature.

This is in line with the Government's commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the key goals that need to be met for achieving all the MDGs is MDG 3 - "Promote Gender Equality." Lao PDR has one of the highest representations of women in parliament in Southeast Asia. Currently at the National Assembly there are 25 women that is almost 23 percent of the total membership. The figure indicates that Lao PDR is ahead of Cambodia (7.4%), India (8.8%), Thailand (9.2%), Philippines (17.8%) and China (21.8).

The government has also subscribed to the Beijing Platform for Action and other gender related conventions. The National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010 (NSEDP) has mainstreamed gender through its strategic priority sectors. Despite these positive developments, continued efforts need to be made for example in areas of promoting girls and boys equal access to schooling, sex-disaggregated data collection and incorporation of this information into policy planning. Having women elected could also contribute towards empowering women country-wide.

To provide women candidates with appropriate training, UNDP invited the Honorable Dr. Kay Patterson, Senator of Victoria, Parliament of Australia to work with selected women candidates. Senator Patterson is a high-ranking politician, former Australian Minister of Health and Community Services with 19 years of experience within the Australian Parliament. Senator Patterson shared her experience with 40 women running for seats at the next National Assembly, 23 out of them being new candidates without any previous experience as parliamentarians.

Several distinguished guests, Governor of Bolikhamxay Province, Mr. Khampane Philavong, Chair of the Social and Cultural Committee at the National Assembly, Honorable Ms Thongphanh Chanthalanoun and UNDP Assistant Resident Representative, Mr. Jamshed Kazi, inaugurated the training that was held in Paksan. The speakers highlighted the



importance of receiving training to boost women's ability to acquire seats in the Lao National Assembly.

During the first day, the discussions focused on the important responsibilities held by a Member of Parliament. Senator Patterson was able to share some of her personal experiences as a parliamentarian in Australia. She requested the women to brainstorm about issues that effect all women in Lao PDR as well as key issues that need to be addressed by the National Assembly.

Leadership, advocacy, policy and political negotiating skills were under discussion during the second day. Participants took part in many sessions, such as, policy making, negotiation and participatory skills.

One of the candidate's addressed the need of education in rural areas, "It is crucial that the Government continues to provide resources for education in rural areas. If I am elected I will try to push for a special budget for education and teachers." Another noted, "women need to be trained to raise the quality of labour additionally handicrafts need to produced in larger quantities in the rural area. This will provide more money in the women's pocket." Yet another wanted to improve health care in poor areas so as to reduce infant mortality rate.

Effective use of media, public speaking and political speeches was also emphasized at the training. "I found the training very useful. I will be now very cautious how I address my potential voters. . Senator Patterson clearly demonstrated how to speak with clarity," said one of the new candidates. "I will watch TV carefully to see how people behave in front of a camera," added another.

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Notes for editors:

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