

**Press Release**

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For Immediate Release

**Lao PDR gives lead on significant humanitarian and disarmament treaty****The United Nations urges more states to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions**

The United Nations congratulated the Government of the Lao PDR on its signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, one of the most significant humanitarian and disarmament treaties of the decade, when it opened for signature in the Norwegian capital Oslo on 3 December. In his message to the gathering, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged all governments to sign and ratify the Convention without delay in order to “enhance the protection of civilians, strengthen human rights and improve prospects for development.”

The Lao PDR, as the state most affected by cluster munitions on a per capita basis, played a leading role in campaigning for this worldwide ban on the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster bombs, and was the second of 93 countries to sign the treaty during the opening ceremony, after the host country Norway. The Lao PDR, represented by Mr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, offered to host the first meeting of States Party to the Convention, one year after the 30<sup>th</sup> country ratifies and the Convention comes into force.

A specially-commissioned 5-minute film that starkly portrays the devastating human and development impacts of UXO contamination on the Lao PDR today, 30 years after the end of the conflict in which the weapons were used, was screened during the ceremony. As the audience discovered, UXO still injures and kills around 300 Lao people every year. Hiding everywhere, these deadly weapons can be found in rice fields, school yards, on hillsides, in rivers, along roads and paths and even in towns. As well as posing constant danger, cluster munitions contribute to greater food insecurity of already poor and often malnourished rural people by limiting their access to farmland and killing their livestock. UXO increases poverty, makes development activities more expensive and limits the socio-economic development of the entire country.

With up to 25 percent of Lao villages affected by UXO and cluster munitions, Dr. Maligna Saignavongs, National Director of the NRA, emphasized how crucial it is that the Convention on Cluster Munitions is implemented in full, including the commitment of resources by signatories to affected states to enable them to clear their land of cluster munitions. For the Lao PDR, this challenge is on a vast scale as, even with the current programme supported by the UNDP and many donor parties, it is estimated that it will take up to 16 years just to clear high priority land for agriculture, schools, villages and irrigation. For the UN Country Team in the Lao PDR, UXO is a priority that is not only about clearance, as programmes supported countrywide include risk reduction education for children and adults, addressing the growing trade in scrap metal UXO and rehabilitation services for UXO victims.

Mr Ta Duangchom, a Lao delegate to Oslo, told attendees from around the world about his long struggle to regain his independence after a cluster munition accident in which he was blinded and lost both arms, and expressed his happiness that so many countries, including his own,

had signed the convention. As Mr. Bounkeut Sangsomsak, Lao Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, said at the Conference on Cluster Munitions in Dublin in May, "... we do not want other peoples to experience the same pain and suffering as the Lao people have and continue to endure."

"Today we came together" said Kathleen Cravero, United Nations Assistant Administrator and Director of UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, "to protect future generations from billions of stockpiled cluster sub-munitions as well as explosive bomblets that still litter the earth."

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**Notes for editors:**

The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) 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.