

Signing ceremony between the Government of Australia and the United Nations Development Programme to Support to Quality Management of the UXO Sector in Laos 2009-2011

**Opening Remarks by: Mr. Dirk Wagener
UNDP Deputy Resident Representative (Programme) a.i.**

Vientiane, Lao PDR
29 April 2010

***His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Al-Hussein of Jordan
Ms. Raine Dixon, Head of Development and Cooperation,
Ms Viengsavanh Sipraseuth, Deputy Director General, DIO,
MoFA***

***Dr. Maligna Saignavongs, Director of the NRA
Mr. Bounpone Sayasenh, Director of UXO Lao
Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Before making my opening remarks I would like to extend a special and warm welcome to His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Al-Hussein of Jordan who is visiting the country as Special Envoy of the President [Ambassador Susan Eckey of Norway] of the second Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban

Convention – usually referred to as Ottawa convention. HRH is advocating for the universal ratification of this important treaty and since it can be considered the “sister-treaty” so-to-say of the Oslo convention on the ban of Cluster Munitions we have extended our invitation to HRH today to be our guest of honor and to witness this auspicious occasion. Once again Your Royal Highness, welcome to the Lao PDR and the United Nations and thank you for being with us here today.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this signing ceremony for the Government of Australia’s generous contribution in support to quality management of the UXO Sector in Laos 2009-2011. The contribution will support seven sub-projects of NRA and UXO Lao with a total funding of AUD 2,5 million [USD 2,313,100] for the period of 18 months through the Trust Fund for Support to the Full Implementation of the Convention on

Cluster Munitions. The Trust Fund has recently been established jointly between the Government of the Lao PDR and UNDP for enhancing activities to support the implementation of the Convention in the Lao PDR within the Framework of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

As we all know, the presence and scale of UXO pose humanitarian challenges and are an impediment to poverty reduction and development in the Lao PDR. Bombies have caused death and injuries to an average 300 people a year over the past decade. In addition, they prevent access to agricultural land and require substantial additional resources for UXO clearance before any kind of development such as road building, tourism development or school construction to name just few examples can take place in UXO-affected areas. Therefore, UXO clearance in the Lao PDR is a precondition for the achievement

of the Millennium Development Goals and graduation of the country from the Least Developed Country status by 2020.

In this context, the Government of Australia has been a long-standing and strong supporter of the UXO sector since the inception of UXO Lao in 1996, by providing funding for UXO clearance, victim assistance, risk education activities and capacity development of the NRA and UXO Lao.

In supporting the UXO sector, the Government of Australia ensures mainstreaming of UXO clearance into the development agenda by allocating resources for development interventions where clearance has occurred. Australia is also a strong advocator in mainstreaming gender into the UXO sector.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated that the Convention on Cluster Munitions is a major

advance on the global disarmament agenda. For the Lao PDR, the year 2010 provides a great chance for strengthening our advocacy efforts and for ensuring wide support to the UXO sector because the Government of the Lao PDR will host the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention in November 2010 and assume the Presidency for one year thereafter.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is crucial to accelerate and coordinate assistance from the international community to collectively make the First Meeting of States Parties a success, and beyond that, assist the Government of Lao PDR with the implementation of the Convention. The obligations under the Convention will not be met without sustained and increased financial support from the international community.

The Government of Australia shows does show its strong commitment and leadership in this regard by providing support including to the First State Party Meeting through the newly established Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is the preferred modality by the Government of the Lao PDR and many development partners as it implements the principles of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. It is an instrument for donor harmonization of the sector support and it strengthens the Government's ownership and leadership in the sector.

Let me once again thank you for the continued support by the Government of Australia in reducing the risk of UXO and cluster munitions for the people of Lao PDR through the Trust Fund.

Thank you very much for your attention.