

**Press Release****18 FEBRUARY 2010****For Immediate Release****ADVANCING THE GLOBAL DISARMAMENT AGENDA - ENSURING RESULTS FOR THE LAO PDR**

The Government of Lao PDR and UNDP organized a Special Event on Cluster Munitions on 18 February 2010 in Vientiane. Opening remarks were given by His Excellency Mr. Phongsavath Boupoua, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator.

The Special Event was organized under historic circumstances, with 30 countries ratifying the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The convention will enter into force on 01 August 2010.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Yangchen Rana emphasized the possibilities now within reach: "Through the requirement of this Convention to complete clearance in 10 years, we can work towards solutions to the cluster munitions and UXO threat for the Lao PDR. Indeed the Convention, with its global scale and provisions for the assistance and cooperation from other states parties and with the support of international organizations and civil society, can be the solution for the Lao PDR - provided the international community can accelerate its commitment to the sector, enabling the Government to maintain and strengthen its outstanding commitment."

The United Nations is working as One for the UXO sector, with each agency playing their part. To name but a few, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs – UNODA, global support from HQ BCPR (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery) and country office, UNICEF support to risk education and UNDP support to UXO Lao and the NRA.

The 2008 UXO sector evaluation shows that Lao PDR can at present capacity clear all contaminated agricultural land in 16 years. "However, by scaling up resources we can achieve this even quicker, perhaps in 10 years. With an increase of roving team capacity UXO Lao can reduce its response time to a few days rather than weeks, preventing people from becoming victims, and it can together with other clearance organizations work in affected provinces which currently have no clearance operations", Ms. Yangchen Rana continued.

Lao PDR is poised to host the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention scheduled later this year, an event of the highest magnitude, and to support its offer to assume the first Presidency.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the 30th ratification of the Convention, a major advance on the global disarmament agenda, and calls on all States to become a party to the Convention without delay. UN Resident Coordinator underscored the importance of accelerated and coordinated assistance from the international community to collectively make the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention a success, but beyond that, by assisting the Government with the implementation of the Convention through UXO clearance and victim assistance.

Lao PDR is the most cluster munition and UXO affected country in the world with up to 25% of the country's 10,000 villages affected by the presence of these explosive remnants of war. During the period between 1964 to 1974, it is estimated that in excess of 260 million sub-munitions were dropped over the country. With an average failure rate of 30%, it is estimated that as many as 87 million of them failed to explode and remain scattered throughout the country.

For more information please contact:

Janet Pontin, Tel 267777 ext: 715, Email janet.pontin@undp.org
Head of Public Information Unit

Iori Kato, Tel 267777 ext: 709, Email iori.kato@undp.org
Head of Crisis Prevention Recovery & UXO Unit, UNDP