



Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights

9 December 2008
National Cultural Hall, Vientiane, Lao PDR

Opening Remarks by Mme. Sonam Yangchen Rana UN Resident Coordinator / UNDP Resident Representative

*His Excellency Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Honourable Members of the Presidium
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Today marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, only ten years ago in 1998 the Lao PDR joined other nations from around the world and became part of the international community to commemorate the 50th Anniversary. There have been so many changes since then.

The Lao PDR has undergone significant economic and social development and emerged as a vibrant community dedicated to building prosperity for its people. Additionally, the Lao PDR has made important and steady progress in signing and ratification of several important human rights instruments.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The theme for the commemoration of the 60th Anniversary is *Dignity and Justice for All of Us*. This is significant because as you know, the Universal Declaration was adopted 60 years ago. But it embodies values and ideals of justice and human dignity which are as relevant today as they were when the Universal Declaration was adopted in 1948. These human rights values are timeless

They enshrine fundamental values such as the right to life, the right to health care, the right to shelter and the basic social rights to family. They also enshrine the right to fair trial and respect for due process. As the name of the Declaration suggests, these rights are universal in character. They embody values that speak to the humanity in all of us without regard to race, culture or indeed political ideology. They are also consistent with United Nations Millennium Development Goals and important foundations for social justice in the process of economic development including to meet the Government's goals of exiting from LDC status by 2020.

I would like to take the opportunity at today's commemoration to draw attention to two important elements about the Universal Declaration. The first element is that the Declaration was the first major Human Rights instrument to be adopted by the United Nations. The second element is that it is very comprehensive.

As the first and the most comprehensive instrument, the Universal Declaration provides an important foundation for other human rights instruments in the international community. I am therefore very pleased to see that the agenda for today's celebration includes comments and discussions on several human rights treaties that the Lao PDR has ratified or signed.

Today's commemoration is both a time for celebration and a chance for introspection -- to take stock of the implementation of human rights and to evaluate where we want to go. On this occasion I take the opportunity to congratulate the Government of the Lao PDR for taking the lead in Asia in signing the United Nations Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in September 2008. Congratulations also on the recent signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in December 2008.

In the same context, the Lao PDR is also considering the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other human rights treaties it has signed but not ratified. Like the Universal Declaration, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is almost universal in its acceptance today. 160 countries around the globe have united in partnership in accepting the Covenant. These countries include some of Lao PDR's immediate neighbours such as Vietnam and Cambodia. The experience and lessons learned from them and others provide a good basis for the Lao PDR to consider ratification of the Covenant.

The United Nations is aware of the many constraints on the Lao PDR in terms of its capacity and resources generally to meet some of the reporting obligations under human rights treaties. In this regard I am pleased to say that as a committed partner of the Lao PDR in its efforts to enhance the country's participation in the international legal process, the United Nations, together with international development partners, stands ready and willing to assist the Lao PDR to ratify international instruments that it has signed or will do in the future.

With support from Finland and the European Commission, the UNDP has partnered the Government since 2002 to strengthen the legal process including implementation. Continued support and attention will be given to enhance the capacity of the Lao PDR in its engagement in international law, including developing the national capacity for reporting compliance and related obligations under human rights treaties.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Finally, I want to congratulate and thank the Government, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the comprehensive range of activities organized -- including a symposium, an art exhibition and several cultural and social activities, and a concert -- aimed at youth and the community in general, to help raise social awareness.

On this very important commemoration day, let us all together celebrate the achievements of the Lao PDR in pursuing its human rights commitments consistent with the Universal Declaration. As we do so, let us also build on the country's successes and learn from our challenges. Thus we can ensure that when we meet again to commemorate the next decade of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we will have yet more to celebrate in bringing Dignity and Justice to all of us, but most importantly to the Government and people of the Lao PDR.

Thank you

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