



## **National Assembly Inter-Session Programme**

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

**31 August – 3 September 2009  
Savannakhet Provincial Office, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR**

*Honourable Mr. Thongteun Zayasene; Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee, Chief of the NA Cabinet;  
Honourable National Assembly Committee Chair and Vice-Chairpersons;  
Honourable Members of the National Assembly and distinguished participants to this Inter-Session Programme;  
Ladies and gentlemen:*

I wish first to express to you and to all participants in this second Inter-Session in 2009 my great pleasure at being here today. As you know, the UN gives great importance to the role and functions of the National Assembly and has since January pooled our efforts to ensure an effective Lao National Assembly programme.

This first UN Joint Programme in the Lao PDR is already bearing fruit. It is a “one-stop shop” which enables UN agencies and other development partners to more effectively align workplans with the agenda and priorities of the Assembly, improving national capacity and national ownership of the programme. Through this joint programme, the Assembly benefits to the greatest extent from the sectoral expertise for various specialized agencies, delivered in a coordinated and manageable way.

This is reflected in the quality of the agenda of the Inter-Session workshops. In March, The National Assembly discussed the world economic crisis, covering global and national impact and the key issues of sustainable use of natural resources, access to livelihoods, and environment management for pro-poor growth.

During this session, you will discuss the outlines of the 7<sup>th</sup> NSEDP. The process of NSEDP finalization by the Government and its review and adoption by the National Assembly has now entered its concluding phase. You will also review the implementation of the recently adopted law on investments, promotion of foreign direct investment as a contribution to equitable economic development, and the battle against malnutrition.

In this last vital area, a delegation of Members of the Assembly will conduct a field visit to a pilot nutrition project in one nearby district, and will report their findings back to the Inter-Session.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the National Assembly, its Standing committee and Cabinet, the ministries and government agencies, the UN agencies, the ADB, the national and foreign experts and the SELNA team, who have jointly made this initiative possible. I am certain that this 4-day programme will provide the National Assembly

Members with valuable information, and that it will be an excellent opportunity for them to raise questions to the ministries on many topical issues.

Economic growth based on sustainable and equitable development, access to education and health care, enhanced people's participation and women's empowerment are crucial to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> NSEDP in 2015. By 2020, or 5 years later, the Government would like to exit from status of a Least Developed Country. For this, among others, the legal sector reform and goals to become a state governed by the rule of law are essential.

Good governance, economic growth, and achievements in the social sectors are all closely interrelated. Laos urgently needs skilled workforce, better education, enhanced healthcare, and improved public infrastructures. This, in turn, requires progress in good governance and fair administration, in accountability and transparency, and certainty in applicable legislation, a favourable environment for foreign direct investment, and citizens' adherence to governments' policies.

Major steps towards these goals have been achieved during the last 12 months, by the government's endorsement of the legal sector master plan and the decision to promote decentralization and improved accountability at local level through the re-establishment of local councils in provinces. A well-judged devolution of competencies and revenue management from central to local governments will enable better public service delivery. The creation of local governments will also allow more involvement and engagement of Lao citizens in the social and economic development of their country.

This recreation of local councils will require several fundamental issues to be addressed, such as the challenge of centralization of government revenue and transfer of budgets at provincial level, or the establishment of a new management and reporting system for central government officials. The United Nations in the Lao PDR stands ready to support in any way required, including studies on these developments.

Today, we are at the start of a 4-day programme which I know will be useful and constructive, based on the agenda. An initiative of the National Assembly Inter-Session programmes will provide more opportunities for Assembly Members to meet with actual ministerial counterparts and to develop 2-way exchanges between the executive and citizens' representatives. Inter-Sessions are also tailored, through debates and exchanges of views between Assembly Members and the Resource Persons or panelists to help to put forward people's expectations for government attention.

This is all vitally important to the discussions taking place about the priorities for the 7<sup>th</sup> NSEDP, and we hope that this discussion will be continued and deepened in further workshops at committee level over the next few months.

Honourable Mr. Thongteun Xayasene, I thank you once again for this invitation, and I wish you all success in this important initiative.