

**Address by****Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator****On the Occasion of the Celebration of United Nations Day****Friday, 23 October 2009, UN House, Vientiane**

*Your Excellency Mme. Pany Yathotou, Vice-President of the National Assembly
Excellencies Ministers and Vice Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished guests, UN colleagues and friends.*

On behalf of the United Nations Country Team in the Lao PDR it is my great privilege to welcome you all to this celebration today. It is wonderful to see you all here this evening to mark the 64th birthday of the United Nations and celebrate 54 years of UN-Lao cooperation.

I will not take too long to talk about what the UN does as, Your Excellency Madame Pany, you have so eloquently described the many ways in which we work together here in Lao PDR. But I would like to highlight the theme of UN Day this year, climate change. Here we are already feeling the impacts as floods, storms and extreme weather events cause suffering.

As Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, has said, “People look to the United Nations to defeat poverty and hunger, to keep the peace, to expand education and stand up for human rights in every corner of the globe.” Guiding our development work is the belief that eradicating poverty and improving the well-being of people everywhere are vital steps in creating conditions for lasting world peace.

The theme of today – Climate Change – is a challenge that is inextricably linked with our aim to create a better life for all people in this country.

At this difficult time for Laos, with communities in the south suffering from the impact of floods caused by tropical storms, it is a timely reminder that extreme weather events are likely to happen more often as the climate changes. This inflicts more than short term suffering. Villagers in, Attapeu, Sekong, Saravan, Savannakhet and Champassak have lost their harvest, their homes have to be rebuilt, while their children’s education is disrupted and their health is in danger.

When the climate changes, the most vulnerable people will suffer the most. Fragile livelihoods have little or no capital to rebuild and recover. The predicted effects of climate changes around the world will be long lasting and far reaching. The UN Framework for Climate Change currently estimates that global losses due to these changes are between \$160 to 300 billion dollars. These costs could increase fivefold by the year 2030.

In order to limit the current rate of global warming, developed countries need to cut emissions of greenhouse gasses by at least 40% by 2020. Although Laos contributes little to rising carbon emissions, its contribution is growing along with the rapid pace of economic development. We are part of the global environment and must play our part to tackle this challenge by ensuring that this country's growth is achieved on a low-carbon path. If we don't, there is a risk that shifts in climatic conditions will undermine the country's progress towards achieving the MDGs and exiting LDC status by 2020, as well as altering precarious environmental balances.

These shifts will require a change in attitudes and come at a price. Current estimates suggest that the measures developing countries will have to make in order to adapt to these realities could cost as much as \$100 billion dollars per year.

In Lao PDR, the UN will support the Government as it prepares for the impact of climate change at the strategy level, helping to integrate climate change factors into poverty reduction processes and to pursue a sustainable low-carbon path to growth. We will be supporting the Lao national delegation to the landmark UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen later this year, so that they can actively participate in negotiations to seal a comprehensive and equitable deal for our generation and beyond. We will also be working closely with the Government on developing the skills and capacities required for the changes that will be needed on the ground.

Excellencies and colleagues,

The UN Day theme of Climate Change also served as the theme for the young Lao people who took part in yesterday's Model UN Security Council Simulation, held in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am very glad to see so many of the participants here this evening. I would like to share with you how impressed I was by the awareness about climate change shown by the students who represented member countries of the Security Council. Through their research and hard work, they are well placed to serve as youth ambassadors, helping other young people understand the very real challenges posed by climate change, showing at the same time the potential of the next generation that we must enlist. In fact they've given us some great ideas, and I encourage anyone who is interested in the subject to read the position papers that they developed in order to be inspired and motivated to action.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

This is not just the UN's Day, it is everyone's day. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Lao PDR for your continued partnership with the UN system, and your leadership in setting goals and targets for us to work towards. I would like to thank all our development partners and especially our donors, for assisting us to implement our programmes of cooperation with the Lao PDR. And, most importantly, I thank the United Nations staff for your hard work and dedication - without you, none of our achievements would have been possible!

Thank you.

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