

UXO Strategic Plan, “The Safe Path Forward” Review Workshop

20 May 2009, Vientiane

Opening Remarks by
Dirk Wagener
UNDP Assistant Resident Representative

On behalf of
Madam Sonam Yangchen Rana
UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative

H.E. Madam Onechanh Thammavong, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and Vice Chair of the National Regulatory Authority,

Ambassador Dr. Maligna Saignavongs, Director of the National Regulatory Authority,

Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Director General of the Department for International Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Distinguished guests, development partners, United Nations colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here today on behalf of Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, to witness the opening of this very important workshop which will review and revise the national strategic plan for the UXO Sector.

We at UNDP are very aware that UXO, and in particular, cluster munitions continue to threaten the lives and livelihoods of people in Lao PDR today - many decades after the end of the war. UNDP is a long-time supporter of the Government in this sector. We assisted the Government to establish UXO Lao in 1996 and we continue to support the 1,000 women and men working in the nine worst

UXO-affected Provinces for UXO Lao. UNDP also assisted the Government to establish the NRA as it was designed in the Sector Strategy, “the Safe Path Forward” and it is the mandate of the NRA that the strategy is now revised.

“The Safe Path Forward” was drafted in 2002 for the period 2003 to 2013. Although relevant when it was adopted by Decree, it was developed before the NRA became operational and before International NGOs worked independently in the UXO sector. It does not include the commercial aspects of the sector and was in force before the Disability and Cluster Munitions Conventions were signed by the Lao Government. It also predates the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and does not fit with the Government’s vision of exiting Least Developed Countries status by 2020. It also needs to highlight areas where it supports and contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. All of this means it needs to be revised with the participation of all stakeholders to ensure its continued relevance and appropriateness for the Lao context in 2009 and beyond.

In addition to supporting the NRA and UXO Lao, UNDP has helped to lay some of the foundations for this review - most recently with the UXO Sector Evaluation and the Assessment Study of Gender Perspectives in the UXO Sector, which were both completed last year. The Management Response we worked on with our partners will give substantive input on how the recommendations of the Evaluation are considered and the Gender Study will help us mainstream this important subject throughout the new strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Now is a very exciting period with many opportunities that we need to seize and make the most of. We are over mid-way through the 2003-2013 “Safe Path Forward” and a lot of valuable lessons have been learned. Last year in particular was a remarkable year for the whole of the UXO Sector in Laos, with achievements that give us hope for the future. The Government of Lao PDR, supported by development partners, played a strong leadership role from the very beginning of the Oslo process to develop the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The Regional Conference the Government hosted in Xiengkhuang in October last year was the first to be held in a UXO affected area. The field trips demonstrating clearance and risk education activities contributed to the Conference’s huge success in awareness-raising to further the aims of the Convention. And the success will be a small affair in comparison to the First Member States Parties’ Meeting of the Convention a year after it comes into force as the Government has offered to host it in Vientiane. This conference is expected to bring up to a hundred countries here in 2010 to discuss progress on eliminating cluster munitions for all time.

UN agencies throughout the country are supporting the UXO sector in clearance, victim assistance and risk education activities. Today, I reaffirm the commitment of the UN Country Team in Lao PDR to continuing partnerships and support for the UXO sector.

The recent Cluster Munitions Convention and the ongoing achievements of the national UXO programme gives us all the hope and confidence that the impacts of UXO in Lao PDR can be

comprehensively addressed - with the continued commitment of the Government and the harmonised support of the international community. The partnerships are established. We now need an up-to-date clear and decisive strategy to guide us. It is only with good strategic leadership that the deadly threats from UXO can be lifted from the Lao people.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the Government on its achievements in the UXO sector and I am pleased to have this opportunity today to reaffirm the UN's support and wish you well with the strategy review and revision.

I wish you all good health.

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