



**UNDP supported NRA and UXO Lao projects Annual Review Meeting**  
**UNDP Conference Room, 15 December 2008**

**Opening Remarks by Mme. Sonam Yangchen Rana,**  
**UN RC/UNDP RR**

Mr. Salermxay Khommasith, Director General of International Organization Department, MoFA,  
Dr. Maligna Saignavongs, the Director of the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO Sector,  
Mr. Bounpone Sayasenh, the National Programme Director of the UXO Lao, Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the annual review meeting for the UNDP supported NRA and UXO Lao projects. Normally this meeting would take place in a government facility, but we wanted to take this opportunity to invite our partners to our new home. We are grateful to the Government of the Lao PDR for allocating this space in a prime location and for their generous financial support to the construction of this beautiful building. I see this UN House as a symbol of the deep cooperation and trust between the Lao Government and United Nations which has continued for more than 50 years, and I hope that we can foster the partnership further in 2009 and beyond.

There are a number of achievements this year which all stakeholders who have been in the UXO Sector should be proud of and celebrate. As we all know, earlier this month the Government of the Lao PDR signed the new critical convention in Oslo, which bans member states from using, stockpiling, producing and transferring cluster munitions. We have all praised the Government of the Lao PDR so many times, but nevertheless I can not congratulate them enough on their critical leadership role throughout the process.

Coordination mechanisms such as the UXO Sector Working Group and sub-sector Technical Working Groups are now providing a more and more effective forum for information sharing and dialogues for all stakeholders at different levels, and they are feeding into the Round Table Process. We also had a comprehensive UXO sector evaluation in 2008, whose findings and recommendations provide a solid basis for the review of the National Strategic Plan and future programming.

Ladies and gentlemen, while 2008 was a remarkable year especially for those who were involved in the UXO Sector in the Lao PDR, 2009 will be an even more important. In Oslo, the Lao PDR offered to host the first meeting of states parties to the convention here in Vientiane, so preparation for this and ratification of the convention at the earliest possible time will be critical. In order to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions, it is necessary to expand the programme to speed up and improve the related work alongside



the strategy review. I suggest that we start working on the strategy review as soon as we all return from our New Year break.

UXO Lao has gone from strength to strength and, as you will hear in the presentation by Mr. Bounpone later, has been improving its efficiency.

Let me briefly highlight the key achievements. As of the end of November, UXO Lao had cleared 2,531 hectares of land for productive use, of which 254 hectares was for direct support of 19 development projects. Roving tasks by UXO Lao mobile teams are on target with 1,303 tasks completed during the last 11 months in order to remove immediate dangers posed by surface UXO.

UXO Lao also continues to explore ways in which land can be safely and quickly released without 100% clearance. With a new advisor from Norwegian People's Aid on board, I understand that the implementation of the enhanced technical survey is moving forward.

During a visit to the US in September, UXO Lao investigated the potential use of new technology in the form of a 'geophysical survey'. The NPD and STA judge it to be applicable to the Lao context and we hope to find funding to allow UXO Lao to conduct a trial. If this potential use is confirmed, a geophysical survey would enable a rapid assessment of the UXO threat to the rural roads of southern Laos, in the Ho Chi Minh trail areas. This would then allow a work plan to be developed to address the threat, thus providing a massive boost to infrastructure development in the affected provinces.

Successful implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions really depends on operators like UXO Lao who are working on the ground in affected communities. We should explore all possible avenues to do our best to fulfil the obligations of the convention, though we all know that the country is so severely affected that it is impossible to destroy all cluster munitions in 10 or even 15 years.

To speed up the required clearance work in the Lao PDR, independent operations by other clearance organizations will be necessary. We urge, as we have done before, the NRA to assist these independent operators and expedite the MOU process.

Now we will spend the rest of our time today on discussions, especially about work plans for the coming critical year. I look forward to open and candid exchanges of views and opinions.

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