



Press release:

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL OPTIMISTIC THAT LAO PDR WILL GRADUATE FROM LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRY STATUS BY 2020

Vientiane – April 11, 2009:

United Nations Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon has said he is optimistic that the Lao PDR will meet its national development goals - to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by its target date of 2020.

Mr Ban was speaking during a short visit to Vientiane - the first by any Secretary-General in nearly a quarter of a century – during which he held talks with His Excellency Choummaly Sayasone, President of the Lao PDR, and other government leaders.

Addressing ministers, development partners and UN staff at the inauguration of the newly-completed UN House in Vientiane, Mr Ban said the government was to be congratulated for its commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and the steady progress it had made in improving health, education and living standards.

However he stressed the scale of the challenges to be addressed. “There is a great deal to celebrate – but there is also cause for concern,” said the Secretary-General, highlighting high rates of child malnutrition and maternal mortality, and poverty rates in rural areas.

The Secretary-General described the new Millennium Development Goals report – launched at UN House – as a valuable tool for the Government and its development partners. To achieve the improvements still required in several areas, he urged “greater investments in human development, the social sector and environmental sustainability.”

During the ceremony Mr Ban stressed that he shared the concerns of the Government, UN agencies and development partners in Laos about the potential effects of the global financial crisis on Laos and other developing countries. He used his recent visit to the G-20 Summit, he said, to sound the alarm about the world’s most vulnerable people. “I wanted to make sure that leaders in London did not forget subsistence farmers in Laos.” “Now”, he emphasised, “the goal is to keep donors to their pledges.”

During inauguration of the UN House, he noted that the building, which provides space for nine UN agencies and was funded by the Government, “embodies the long history of cooperation and trust between the Lao Government and the United Nations — a relationship nurtured over more than half a century.”

More than 200 UN staff members from all agencies working in Laos then met in UN House to hear the Secretary-General share his vision of UN Reform and cooperative working. In response to questions at a Staff Forum in the central open-air courtyard, he

promoted a collaborative spirit among UN agencies in the spirit of UN reform as the most effective means of promoting development

Visiting a centre providing health and other services to young people, the Secretary-General spoke with youth involved in peer-to-peer education on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other traditionally sensitive issues.

Throughout his visit the Secretary-General expressed his pleasure to be in the Lao PDR, and the continuing commitment of the United Nations to work with the Government and the people of the country to work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

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