

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Opening address by
Mr. Dirk Wagener, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative a.i. for the
United Nations in the Lao PDR
on behalf of Ms Sonam Yangchen-Rana, UN Resident Coordinator**

National Assembly/Ministry of Justice
With the support of the SELNA UN Joint Programme and the European Commission
delegation to the Lao PDR
Training seminar for the students with the 4th grade (Master 1) of the Lao National
Faculty of Law and Political Science, Vientiane
Tuesday June 8, 2010, 08:00am

Your Excellency Mr. Ket Kettisak, Vice-Minister of Justice,
Your Excellency Mr. Viseth Svengsuksa, Vice-Chief of the National
Assembly Cabinet,
Dear Mr. Khamson SOULIYASENG, Dean of the Faculty,
Dear Mr. Henry Prankerd, Chargé d'Affaires of the Delegation of the
European Commission,
Dear students,

I wish to express my great pleasure for being here today, with you
students of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences to open this training
seminar on parliaments, the European institutions and the United
Nations.

It may seem to some of you that this combination of three topics is
somewhat unrelated. So please allow me to explain what brought us to
discuss this together here today.

Over the last years, since 1997 to be precise, the National Assembly of the
Lao PDR has benefited from the assistance of the international

community to enhance its capacities. This support has been provided from the origin by the United Nations, with the generous contribution of European Donor Countries and since 2004 also directly from the European Union. You may then consider that this blend today among three different topics of discussion is due to the operating actors of this parliamentary development programme. This might be closer to reality, but you would then still provide only an overturned picture of the situation. Allow me to clarify this conundrum.

Parliaments, the United Nations and the European Union are political institutions based on shared values. And I am certain that Mr. Henry Prankerd, who heads the European Commission delegation in Vientiane will appreciate the following quote of the first full-time President of the European Council Mr. Herman van Rumpuy in his acceptance speech, in November last year who said: "Even if our unity is our strength, our diversity remains our wealth".

Parliaments are the national institutions composed of the elected representatives of all citizens in a given country. No state can be considered representing the interests of its citizenry without an active and powerful parliament at the core of its constitutional arrangements. Parliaments are the preferred forum in any country to discuss and agree on what constitute the guidelines for the action of individuals, civil society and corporations, and to set limits and strict procedures that must be abided by government and public administration. In a nutshell parliaments adopt the laws of the countries and define what make countries governed by the Rule of Law. They are also the elected

institutions to which the government is made answerable to the people's representatives. Parliaments are also the national institutions that may represent the peoples in their diversity, favour equitable and sustainable development, and guarantee that men and women equitably benefit from social and economic growth.

These values are very similar to those that have been defined at the birth of the United Nations in 1945, immediately at the end of World War II. These values were stated in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations: *'We the peoples of the United Nations determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'*.

Concurrently, in a continent devastated by years of war and destruction political leaders from different countries that until then had been enemies had the vision that, by pulling together their efforts into reconstruction, and by setting up a common future based on wealth, the promotion of common values and building on the fruitfulness of their diversity they would work for peace and development. This led the way to what is now the European Union, a community of 27 countries and over 450 million citizens.

I believe you now have a better understanding of why we proposed you to discuss today together parliaments, the UN and the EU. This also explains why the Lao National Assembly, which adopted in 2007 its global development strategy in line with the legal sector reform and the overall objective of lifting out the country of the list of LDCs, has requested the United Nations and the European Union to assist it in its endeavour.

The presentations today will enable you to discuss these three institutions, better understand their role and put them into a joint perspective. As far as I know, the day will be concluded by a quiz that will allow you to win some gifts generously provided by the European Union. So be attentive since each presentation you will get hints along the day.

The Lao National Assembly has convened its 9th ordinary session, due to start next week. During the session some of you will get the opportunity to visit the Parliament, attend the proceedings and perhaps discuss the developments of the Assembly with some of its Members. I know that you will soon take your exams, but I hope a majority of you will nonetheless use this opportunity to understand more your parliament from the inside.

I wish you all the best for your future, and once again thank the keynote speakers for having accepted to take from their time to organise this event.